

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

A Rational Defense of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures

Can we know rationally that the Bible was inspired by God? Can fulfilled prophecy prove the Bible is God's Word? Is there more evidence to show the Bible is historically accurate? How do we know the Bible is the Word of God instead of the Quran (Koran) of Islam?

By Eric V. Snow



IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

A Rational Defense of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures

By Eric V. Snow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Why Should the Bible Matter to Us Today?.....	5
The Old Testament Successfully Predicts the Future.....	
How Can Someone Judge Whether the Bible is a Historically Reliable Document?.....	19
How <u>External Historical Evidence</u> Confirms the Bible.....	37
The <u>Internal Evidence Test</u> : Does the Bible Contradict Itself?.....	53
The <u>Life and Death of Jesus</u> : Implications for Belief.....	60
A Brief Look at the Quran (Koran) of Islam.....	70
Endnotes.....	74

INTRODUCTION: WHY SHOULD THE BIBLE MATTER TO US TODAY?

Is the Bible the infallible word of an Almighty God, as fundamentalist Christians believe? Or is the Bible a collection of Hebrew myths and legends, as atheists and agnostics allege? Do you believe in the Bible by faith alone, trusting that the faith of your parents was correct? Is there any way to prove the Bible is the word of God instead of the Islamic holy book, the Quran (Koran)? Does historical and archeological evidence favor the Bible, or are they against it? Can the Bible's inspiration be proven by human reason? Does God allow us to believe in any religion we want, because "all ways lead to God"? Do human beings live in a world without meaning, in which random natural processes created their bodies and they decompose them for similar reasons? Is the purpose of life merely to maximize pleasure and minimize pain while avoiding getting "caught"? Or do men and women's lives have purpose, because an Almighty God is working out a great plan of His own here below? If the Bible is the Word of God, what is your part in God's plan for humanity? Are there any real answers to the mystery of life? Or are we just supposed to try to figure it all out on our own, using human reason and emotion to stumble along?

DOES THE HYPOCRISY OF BELIEVERS ALLOW OTHERS TO SAFELY REJECT THE BIBLE?

Before considering the evidence for the Bible, it's necessary first to consider two popular objections to belief in it: The hypocrisy of many believers in it, and whether "all paths lead to God." Taking up the issue of Christians believing one thing yet doing another first, many people will reason: "Because my relative, friend, co-worker, boss, or that famous TV evangelist or politician is a hypocrite while professing Christianity, therefore, I won't believe in the Bible." Fundamentally, this argument is unsound for a very simple reason: As a matter of philosophical logic, the Bible is true or false regardless of the behavior of those believing in it. Whether Jesus is or isn't the Son of God and the Savior of humanity has nothing to do over how dishonest is (say) your brother-in-law who claims to be a Christian. Furthermore, each individual's spiritual status before God is determined individually, by one's own conduct and faith, not by someone else's. The sins of (say) a minister who committed adultery have nothing to do over what someone else's spiritual

status is before God: One's own actions and faith determine that, not his. If God wishes someone to be a Christian (John 6:44; Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8:29-30), the sins of some Christian one knows won't save one if one commits similar sins. As the prophet Ezekiel wrote: "The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Eze. 18:20). The sins of someone professing Christianity don't cancel out God's commands for someone else. The proper response to seeing someone who sins yet says he or she is a Christian isn't, "That allows me to do as I please!," but, "I shall do better!"

Then, we need to consider how someone who professes Christianity who sins (say) half as much as he used to is better than the equivalent person who still denies Christianity whose behavior is totally unaffected by God's commands. It's also unfair to demand perfection of others who uphold an absolute morality, while committing the same sins oneself, since human frailty and weakness will inevitably manifest itself in all individuals. (We just tend to overlook the problems we cause for others, saying we had good excuses or motives, while judging others as having the worst possible motives when they do something that hurts us or someone we love). The Bible makes it plain that Christians will sin sometimes (I John 1:8-9): "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Finally, often people will reason, "Because professing Christians killed people through the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the Thirty Years War, etc., therefore, I refuse to believe in the Bible." This argument is rarely run against the other side, though logically it should be: How many people have given up belief in atheism due to the sins of the communist dictators Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung, who butchered roughly 100 million people between them? The body count that atheists have run up in this century alone far exceeds anything that the Roman Catholic Church has accomplished over the past (say) 1700 years combined. Therefore, using the sins of professing Christians to reject the Bible is illogical, since the sins of others don't cancel out God's law as it applies to us individually, and the truth or falsity of the Bible (or God's existence) is logically independent of the sins of anyone believing in it (or Him).

HOW DO WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT "ALL PATHS LEAD TO GOD" IS TRUE?

Do all paths lead to God? Can we be saved regardless of our beliefs, so long as we are sincere enough? The Bible is very clear that there is only one path to God, not many: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). Similarly, the apostle Peter said: "And there is salvation in no one else [Jesus]: for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Saying "all paths lead to God" sounds nice and tolerant, but is it in fact true? What sounds nice may actually be false!

(Consider how many think the dogmas of Marxism sound nice, yet they unleashed rivers of blood in practice!) This statement needs investigating before we accept it, just like any other important belief we have, not mere blind, unthinking acceptance. Today, in our pluralistic, multicultural society, it's condemned as intolerant and politically incorrect to say there is only one true religion. But if an Almighty God inspired these two statements, and they are true, it doesn't matter what any human thinks otherwise. Our job then is to line up our lives with Him, and proclaim that truth to others, regardless of what others may think. The Bible clearly states that there is only one God and one true religion. To say otherwise, and believe (say) Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism are also true religions, is to deny the Bible. For true Christianity, it's incorrect to say that believers in an absolute truth will cause them to persecute others. Although so many professing His name have violated this, Jesus made it clear Christians are to love their enemies, which means persecuting non-believers is always immoral (Matthew 5:44): "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." Likewise the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 12:17-18): "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Sincerity simply isn't enough, since one can be sincerely wrong: Consider all the enthusiastic believers in communism in this century, truly a god that failed. We need to be rational in our religious beliefs, and not just determine them by emotion and tradition alone. But now--how can we know whether the Bible is right when it proclaims it has the only true way to reach God?

HOW THE BIBLE CAN RATIONALLY BE PROVEN TO BE THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible has the answers--but how do you know whether these are the right ones? Suppose you were raised knowing nothing about the Bible, Old Testament or New Testament, like some tribe in the jungles of New Guinea or along the Amazon in Brazil. One day, a missionary comes along, and drops on you a copy of the Bible. Suppose it was in your own language and you are literate enough to read it. How could you judge whether its contents are true? Suppose a competing religion's missionary left a Quran (Koran) behind. How could you judge whether that book was reliable? To be rational in our religious beliefs, instead of just blindly following what our parents believe, we need to apply reason and not just emotion to figuring out what our religious beliefs should be. Later on in this booklet, evidence for the historical reliability of the Bible is presented. But first, fulfilled prophecy is presented as the ultimate proof for the Bible's inspiration. Historical accuracy merely is a necessary condition for inspiration, not a sufficient one. A book could be perfectly accurate historically, such as one on the life of Abraham Lincoln, yet not be inspired by God or hold any authority over our lives. Historical accuracy merely keeps the Bible from being ruled out as the Word of God, but by itself doesn't present much of a positive case for its inspiration. But it's another story to explain how the Bible could predict the future in advance accurately centuries after its prophets died. Rationally, this requires belief that its authors

received supernatural guidance. Below prophecies that were fulfilled after some part of the Bible was written but before the twentieth century are examined. Predictions of events yet to happen, such as judgment day, the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, etc. aren't examined here, because they have yet to happen. Hence, although the Quran may predict repeatedly a day of judgment, that does little to prove God inspired it since that event hasn't happened yet! So let's explore the evidence that the Bible successfully predicted the future, which leads us to infer that its authors received supernatural help.

PART I: THE OLD TESTAMENT SUCCESSFULLY PREDICTS THE FUTURE: BABYLON'S FATE

The great Hebrew prophet Isaiah prophesied in the general period c. 740-700 b.c. Long before the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed Jerusalem, Judah's capital, in 586 b.c., Isaiah predicted the destruction of the city of Babylon itself. Note Isaiah 13:19-20: "And Babylon, the beauty of the kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation . . ." This vast city had (if the ancient Greek historian Herodotus is trusted) a 56-mile circumference and 14-mile long sides, with walls 311 feet high and 87 feet wide. These figures appear exaggerated: Archeological digs indicate the inner city had double inner walls of twelve and twenty feet wide and double outer walls twenty-four and twenty-six feet wide. Nevertheless, since sometimes dirt was put into the area between the double walls such that four horses' spans would fit, Herodotus's figures on the width of the walls weren't that far off. Occupying some 196 square miles (including protected farmland within the outer walls), it was one of the ancient world's greatest cities. In modern terms, Isaiah's prophesy would be the equivalent of predicting the complete devastation and permanent desolation of New York, London, or Tokyo. Situated on the Euphrates River in what is now Iraq, Babylon had been a great center of Middle Eastern culture for some 2000 years. Additionally, predicting the site wouldn't be rebuilt upon again was very bold, since this commonly happened after a city's destruction in the ancient Middle East. After the Greek geographer and historian Strabo visited the site of Babylon during the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 b.c.-17 A.D.), he commented jokingly: "The great city is a great desert." It hasn't been rebuilt since either!

THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH PREDICTED, ONCE THE CAPITAL OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was a great city on the Tigris River in what is now Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia). Willingly burning cities, the Assyrians's cruelty inspired hatred from those they conquered. Sample punishments they inflicted included skinning people alive, burning children, impaling enemies on stakes, and chopping off hands and heads.

Writing around 627 b.c., the prophet Zephaniah predicted Nineveh's destruction along with the Assyrian Empire's: "And He [God] will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and He will make Nineveh a desolation" (Zeph. 2:13). Writing between 661 and 612 b.c., the prophet Nahum predicted Nineveh's destruction (Nahum 2:10; 3:19), with the help of a flood (Nahum 2:6) and fire (Nahum 3:13), during which many of its people would be drunk (Nahum 1:10). Like Babylon, Nineveh was one of the ancient world's greatest cities. Its inner wall was 100 feet tall and 50 feet thick, complete with a 150-foot-wide moat. It boasted a 7-mile circumference. But all this couldn't save it! As predicted (Nahum 3:12), the city fell easily, after a mere three-month siege, to the combined forces of the Medes, Scythians, and Babylonians under Nabopolassar in 612 b.c. Showing this wasn't all mere coincidence, guess work, or hopeful wishing, all of Nahum's specific predictions about how Nineveh would fall were fulfilled.

SWITCHING THE NAMES OF THE CITIES IN THE PROPHECIES WOULD MAKE THEM FALSE

Now let's examine more closely the fate of Babylon and Nineveh, which were by no means fully identical. Since both cities were capitals of nations that were major enemies of Israel, Israel's prophets easily could have switched the names of these cities. Then they would have predicted wrongly, if they had not been inspired by God. Although both cities suffered destruction, Babylon was clearly predicted to never be inhabited again, but this was never prophesied for Nineveh. Today, the site of Babylon is totally uninhabited. The Euphrates River, which still flows through the site, has eroded the ruins on its west side, turning them into a swamp. On its east side, the ruins are mere low hills of debris. Isaiah predicted wild animals would inhabit the ruins. No shepherd would remain there, or stay to rest their flocks (Isa. 13:20-22). As Floyd Hamilton relates, this has literally happened: "Travelers [to Babylon] report that the city is absolutely uninhabited, even [by] Bedouins [Arab nomads]. There are various superstitions current among the Arabs that prevent them from pitching their tents there, while the character of the soil prevents the growth of vegetation suitable for the pasturage of flocks." By contrast, even when the nineteenth-century archeologist Austen Henry Layard investigated the site, a small village sat upon the ruins of Nineveh, nowadays near the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq. Unlike Babylon, the plains around Nineveh's mound are farmed, and animals can graze on it during seasonal rains. Significantly, the site's largest mound has an Arabic name meaning "many sheep." Clearly, if Isaiah had condemned Nineveh instead of Babylon, which would have made sense when he wrote since Assyria was much the greater threat to Israel and Judah in the eighth century b.c., his specific predictions about site of its ruins would have been wrong. The skeptic can't argue that it's easy to predict the destruction of ancient cities, thinking in time all cities eventually will be destroyed. The Bible also predicts specifically how these cities would cease to exist, so these predictions can't be called mere lucky guesses. Furthermore, many ancient cities of the Middle East are still inhabited today, such as

Damascus, Jerusalem, Sidon, Aleppo, etc.¹ Why was Babylon's fate different, its site now having been desolate for centuries after being a center of Mesopotamian civilization for centuries, a city dwelled in for perhaps over two thousand years? Because the God of the Bible yet lives, He intervenes in the affairs of men!

THE ANCIENT PHOENICIAN CITY OF TYRE PROPHECIED TO BECOME "A BARE ROCK"

The seacoast of what is now Lebanon once was the center of the ancient maritime civilization of the Phoenicians. Two of their leading cities were Tyre and Sidon. Colonists sent out from Tyre settled in and established the city of Carthage in what today is Tunisia in north Africa, which later fought (and lost) the three Punic Wars against the Roman Republic in the period 246-146 b.c.. Tyre was most unusual, since one part was built on the mainland opposite the remainder occupying an island about a half mile off the coast. God through the prophet Ezekiel condemned Tyre, predicting its complete demise:

Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. And they will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken . . . and she will become spoil for the nations.' (Ezekiel 26:3-5)

This prophecy initially was fulfilled in several steps. First, as Ezekiel 26:7-11; 29:18 described in advance, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar besieged the part of Tyre that was on the mainland for some thirteen years (585-573 b.c.). He was robbed of the fruits of victory: After his army broke down its walls and occupied it, he found most of the people (and their transportable wealth) had departed for the island city off the coast. Since Tyre had a strong navy, he couldn't attack it without a fleet. When Tyre made peace, it only admitted to Babylon's suzerainty (limited overlordship). Nevertheless, by destroying the mainland part of the city, Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled part of Ezekiel's predictions.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT ATTACKS TYRE, FULFILLS MORE OF THE PROPHECY AGAINST IT

Significantly, Ezekiel uses "he" to refer to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 8-11, but switches over to a more anonymous "they" for verse 12: "Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water." Surely this wasn't the normal fate for an ancient city's rubble, since usually when ancient cities were rebuilt, the new

buildings were conveniently placed on top of the old ones' remnants. What could possibly cause anyone to go through this much bother, to throw a city's ruins into the sea? The main part of the "they" was the next major actor in the drama of Tyre's fate, Alexander the Great (356-323 b.c.). During his campaign of conquest against Persia, he attacked Tyre (332 b.c.) after it denied him permission to sacrifice to the Tyrian god Heracles. He insisted on making the offering in the temple dedicated to Heracles on the island off the coast, not the one in the mainland part of Tyre. (The mainland city had been partially rebuilt after the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar over two centuries earlier). In a remarkable operation, Alexander besieged the island city by taking the rubble of the old mainland city and throwing it into the Mediterranean to build a causeway out to it. After building this land bridge, his army intended to place siege engines up against the island city's strong walls, which seemingly jutted up right out of sea. The siege lasted seven months--once Alexander gained naval supremacy, the city's conquest followed in short order. He punished Tyre by executing 2,000 of its leading citizens and selling 30,000 of those left alive into slavery. Ezekiel prophesied that Tyre's walls and towers would be broken down, and that God "will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock." It happened! In order to build the 200 foot wide causeway into the sea about a half mile, Alexander's army left no visible ruins behind. Is this all mere coincidence?

IS THE PROPHECY AGAINST TYRE TOTALLY FULFILLED?

Ezekiel 26:14 predicted: "'And I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the Lord have spoken,' declares the Lord God." Have these predictions been fulfilled? Clearly, the part concerning the spreading of fishing nets was. After visiting the site of Tyre in recent years, Nina Nelson noted "Pale turquoise fishing nets were drying on the shore." The mainland city became a bare rock due to Alexander's actions in building the causeway, but what about the island city off the coast? Although it never recovered its former great power, it was rebuilt, becoming a major port in the time of Christ during the first century. But after the Muslim Mamelukes captured it from the Crusaders during the Middle Ages, they completely wiped it out in 1291. They wished to ensure some future possible counterattack wouldn't recapture its fort and use it against them again.

Today, a small fishing town of about 12,000 sits on the site of ancient Tyre, due to the Metualis reoccupying the island city site in 1766. The mainland city site remains abandoned, despite it has large natural freshwater springs. Since the town of Sur occupies part of the island city site today, was Ezekiel wrong? Remember, the mainland site is indeed "a bare rock," and no city has ever been rebuilt there. Furthermore, the switch in Ezekiel's language from "he" (Nebuchadnezzar) to "they" (Alexander and the Muslims mainly) to "I" may imply the last part of Tyre's drama will be played out when God directly intervenes during the Second Coming and beyond. By this understanding, this prophecy isn't totally fulfilled yet. Even as it is, the town of Sur has no organic and direct tie to ancient Tyre, since hundreds of years lie between Tyre's

destruction by the Muslims in the thirteenth century and the resettlers of the eighteen century. For example, no buildings of old Tyre survived to be used by the present inhabitants of Sur--unlike the case for Jerusalem. Furthermore, some fishermen must be living nearby to supply the nets to be dried on the rocks of Tyre--they aren't going to sail miles out of their way to do that!² The witness of the mainland site's desolation should be enough to convince skeptics.

THE CITY OF SIDON, TYRE'S RIVAL IN PHOENICIA

Twenty-two miles up the Lebanese coast, Sidon was the mother city of Tyre. Although mentioned together often in the Bible, Sidon's fate was to be quite different.

Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon . . . For I shall send pestilence to her and blood to her streets, and the wounded will fall in her midst by the sword upon her on every side; Then they will know that I am the Lord. (Eze. 28:22-23)

Notice how the prediction prophesies a war torn future for Sidon, but nothing about her total destruction, complete abandonment, or never being inhabited again. Even today, Sidon remains a Lebanese port of some significance, although the capital of Beirut (to the north) is presently more important. After rebelling against the Persian Empire in 351 b.c., the city beat off the initial Persian attempts to quell her. Following betrayal by her king, 40,000 of Sidon's citizens chose to set fire to their own homes and die rather than let the conquering Persians torture them. Three times it changed hands between the Crusaders and Muslims during the Middle Ages. Even in modern times, it has been the scene of conflicts between the Druzes and Turks, the Turks and the French. In 1840, the fleets of France, England, and Turkey bombarded Sidon. Clearly, blood has been spilled in her streets--but each time after being destroyed or damaged, Sidon was quickly rebuilt. Even when the city revolted against Assyrian rule in 677 b.c. and got destroyed in retaliation, the Assyrians created a new provincial capital called "Fort Esarhaddon" on or near the site of the old city. Now, if Ezekiel had switched Tyre's name for Sidon's, wouldn't his prophecies have been proven wrong?³ Nobody came along to toss Sidon's ruins into the sea! How did he know so far in advance that Tyre's fate would be so much worse than Sidon's? How was he able to get the specific details correct? Both cities' ancient inhabitants worshipped false gods using idols, something which Jehovah, the God of Israel, condemned time and time again through His prophets. Rationally speaking, is it plausible Ezekiel just blindly guessed correctly the different destinies of these two cities, although both were similarly sinful in his God's sight?

THE FATE OF GAZA, ASHKELON, AND ASHDOD, CITIES OF THE PHILISTINES

One of the leading traditional enemies of Israel, against whom mighty Samson focused his heroics, were the Philistines. Once living along the Mediterranean coast, devastation for the Philistines' major cities and the end of their national existence was predicted (Eze. 25:15-17; Amos 2:6-8; Jer. 47:5). In particular, notice the grim fates in store for the cities of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron:

For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon a desolation;
Ashdod will be driven out at noon, and Ekron will be uprooted
. . . So the seacoast will be pastures, with caves for shepherds
and folds for flocks. And the coast will be for the remnant of
the house of Judah. They will pasture on it. In the houses of
Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the Lord their
God will care for them and restore their fortune. (Zephaniah
2:4-5, 6-7)

As Eze. 25:15-17 and Zephaniah 2:5 predicted, the Philistines ceased to be an identifiable nation, unlike the Jews. Ashkelon's fate is portrayed differently from the rest. Remaining inhabited and an operational port until the Sultan Bibars destroyed it in 1270, Ashkelon's natural harbor then was intentionally filled with stones to render it useless. A Turkish garrison remained in it until the seventeenth century. As Zephaniah predicted, sheepherding occurred around its site. Most remarkably, since the modern establishment of the state of Israel, Ashkelon has been rebuilt as a "garden city." Indeed today "the remnant of the house of Judah" does lie down "in the houses of Ashkelon" at evening! By contrast, the present-day Palestinian city of Gaza isn't built on the site of its ancient namesake. Although some thought this prophecy was wrong, the ruins of ancient Philistine city of Gaza were found some distance away. During his conquest of Persia, Alexander the Great took this city, killed many of its inhabitants, and sold the survivors into slavery. Buried under sand dunes today, indeed "baldness has come upon Gaza"! (Jer. 47:5). As for Ekron, its location has been evidently lost, after being inhabited until the time of the Crusaders in the Middle Ages. Tell Miqne is the most probable location. Having been tilled in recent times, it remains unsettled. Hence, the "remnant of Judah" dwells in Ashkelon today, but neither Ekron nor Gaza.⁴ Without supernatural guidance, how could have Zephaniah have foretold the future so accurately? Couldn't he have randomly switched Gaza's or Ekron's name with Ashkelon, and criticized as wrong (at least to date)?

THEBES (NO) AND MEMPHIS (NOPH), MAJOR EGYPTIAN CITIES WITH DIFFERENT FATES

Hugging the Nile River as its lifeline, ancient Egypt boasted one of the world's earliest civilizations. Two of its major cities were Thebes (No or No-Amon in Egyptian) and Memphis (Noph). Thebes was the dominant city of southern (upper) Egypt, while Memphis was one of the capitals from which the Pharaohs ruled and the dominant city of northern (lower) Egypt. (Since the Nile flows from the south to the north, unlike most major rivers, "upper" corresponds with "southern," and "lower" with "northern.") Since Egypt was the nation that oppressed Israel as slaves and was a dominant power in Middle Eastern politics for many centuries, these two cities naturally drew the attention of the Hebrew prophets for their idolatry (worshiping false gods using statues). First, consider the fate of Memphis, as prophesied by Ezekiel:

Thus says the Lord God, I will also destroy idols and make the images cease from Memphis. And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt; and I will put fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, set a fire in Zoan and execute judgments on Thebes. . . . I will also cut off the multitude of Thebes. And I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin will writhe in anguish, Thebes will be breached, and Memphis will have distresses daily. (Eze. 30:13-16)

Most remarkably, these predictions were fulfilled. Although the Assyrians under Esarhaddon (670 b.c.) and the Persians under Cambyses (525 b.c.) captured Memphis, the city recovered much of its former position. After visiting it, the Greek geographer Strabo (64 b.c.-after 23 A.D.) declared it second in size to the Egyptian port of Alexandria. But Memphis's doom came with the Muslim invasion of Egypt in the seventh century A.D. After the invading Islamic army conquered Egypt, the caliph Umar (ruled 634-644 A.D.) ordered it not to settle in Alexandria, buy property or take root in Egypt. As a result, it took up residence in an encampment near the fort that had protected Memphis. Over the centuries, this army base (Fustat) became the city of Cairo, Egypt's modern capital. Memphis was progressively abandoned in the meantime, with its people drifting over to Cairo. While one Arab traveler of the thirteen century, Abdul-Latif, declared Memphis to be a "collection of wonderful works," later on the very site was lost. Why? The buildings/ruins of Memphis became a convenient quarry for Cairo. As a result, hardly any stonework was left above ground. The founder of modern scientific archeology, the English Egyptologist Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) commented about the Temple of Ptah area in what once was Memphis: "The site has been so much exhausted for building stone in the Arab ages, that it is not likely that a complete turning over of the whole ground would repay the work." Amelia Edwards commented that the few ruins remaining were hardly worth observing and could easily be listed: "One can hardly believe that a great city ever flourished on this spot." This desolation clearly shows the idols of Memphis ceased to exist, just as Ezekiel foresaw.

THE FATE OF THEBES, ONCE THE CAPITAL OF ANCIENT EGYPT

The leading ancient Egyptian city in upper Egypt (i.e. further up the Nile from the Mediterranean, some 330 miles south of modern Cairo), Thebes's fate differed some from Memphis's. Being a center of the worship of the god Amon, Thebes also served as the capital of ancient Egypt for centuries. Here tourists can still visit the huge temple complexes at Karnak and Luxor. Across the Nile on its west bank lies the famous "Valley of the Kings" where Howard Carter found the tomb of Tutankhamen ("King Tut") in 1923. Although the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and the Persian king Cambyses all took and destroyed Thebes, it was still revived each time. Centuries later, Thebes in 92-89 b.c. suffered a three-year siege by Ptolemy Lathyrus (Cleopatra's grandfather) before getting sacked and burned in punishment. Although Thebes recovered once again, Cornelius Gallus destroyed it (30-29 b.c.) for good during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (27 b.c.-14 A.D.) for joining a tax revolt. The area the city occupied became a small collection of villages. Nine of them mark the spot today. But the ruins remain impressive, complete with many, many idols. When he wrote, Francis Llewellyn Griffith maintained: "Thebes still offers the greatest assemblage of monumental ruins in the world." Importantly, as Ezekiel's prophecy outlined, Thebes suffered from a much more violent history than Memphis's before its very violent end. Ezekiel said Jehovah would "execute judgments on Thebes," would "cut off [kill] the multitude of Thebes," and that "Thebes would be breached." By contrast, besides having her idols destroyed, Memphis merely would have "distresses daily." The multitude of Thebes was suddenly cut off, but Memphis's population just drifted a few miles away to Cairo over the centuries. The ruins of Thebes are far more impressive than the scraps that meet the traveler's eye at Memphis: The idols still stand at Thebes, but not at Memphis. Suppose Ezekiel had switched the names of the two cities. Since the idols have not been cut off from Thebes, he easily could have been called wrong (the escape clause of saying it wasn't yet fulfilled wouldn't look very promising). Skeptics might claim Ezekiel wrote out of some uninspired emotional Hebrew proto-nationalism that hated Egypt and desired its downfall. But then, had he randomly reversed these two cities' names, unbelievers easily could have stamped him as wrong. So then, did he merely "guess" right? Isn't it more sensible, given the mute testimony of the stones in Egypt, to say Ezekiel had supernatural help?⁵

OTHER PREDICTIONS MADE ABOUT EGYPT

Consider other predictions made against Egypt. Although Egypt had been a glorious civilization for centuries, even millennia, when Ezekiel prophesied, he still boldly predicted its coming fall from greatness:

And I shall turn the fortunes of Egypt and shall make them return to the land of Pathros [upper Egypt between roughly Aswan and Cairo], to the land of their origin; and there they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowest of the kingdoms; and it will never again lift itself up above the

nations. And I shall make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. (Eze. 29:14-15)

Since the time Ezekiel lived, other nations and empires have repeatedly conquered Egypt, including Persia, Greece, Rome, the Arabs, the Turks, the French, and finally the British. Although independent today, Egypt is a relatively insignificant Third World country which has lost some four wars against Israel in the past half century. Notice how its fate differed from Assyria's or Babylon's--today Egypt still exists, but total desolation overcame the two Mesopotamian civilizations. Egypt was also no longer to be ruled by its own kings: "And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt" (Eze. 30:13). The line of Pharaohs with even some minimal semi-independence ended with the reestablishment of Persian rule in 341 b.c. Almost ever since, Egypt generally has endured foreign overlords and/or foreign monarchs.⁶ A critic can't say that the Bible only predicts about the destruction of cities or empires--in Egypt's case it predicts its humbling and abasement despite its past centuries of great power, but not its destruction.

PROPHECIES AGAINST EDOM, A RIVAL OF ISRAEL, FULFILLED

Once occupying an area nearly the size of New Jersey to Israel's southeast, the kingdom of Edom had an especially grim future predicted for it. Isaiah 34:9-15; Jeremiah 49:17-18; Ezekiel 25:13-14; 35:5-9 all predict Edom's permanent desolation and destruction. Jeremiah even predicted "no one will live there," while Isaiah predicted "none shall pass through it forever and ever."

Although their language sounds extravagant, especially because cities in the Middle East were often rebuilt after their devastation, but it has almost literally been fulfilled. Despite Ezekiel prophesied during the time Nebuchadnezzar was applying pressure against Judah, who finally virtually leveled Jerusalem (587 b.c.) and hauled the Jews into exile in Babylon, he still predicted Judah would defeat Edom one day. Since Judah had just endured utterly total defeat, his prediction would have seemed absurd in the early sixth century b.c. Nevertheless, during the Maccabean Wars of the second century b.c. it actually happened, when Judas Maccabeus defeated them. (See I Maccabees 5:3, as found in Catholic Bibles). Attacking them as well were John Hyrcanus, who forced them to accept Judaism, and Simon of Gerasa. Although the Edomites took advantage of Rome's impending siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. to rob and kill the Jews therein, soon afterwards they disappear from history. (Rome took formal control of Petra and the Nabataean kingdom that had absorbed Edom in 106 A.D.) Today, Edom's stone city of Petra stands out as one of the most spectacular set of ruins in the world, since it has buildings hewn from cliffs of bare rock. Around the beginning of the first century A.D., the Greek geographer Strabo reported that Petra was a major terminal for caravans crossing the Middle East from Asia. Later, the city had already fallen into decline when the Arabs invaded the area in the seventh century. The Crusaders built a castle there in the twelfth century. But soon afterwards the outside world forgot about the city's very existence, until the Swiss traveler J.L.

Burckhardt discovered it in 1812. Once a center of the Eurasian caravan trade, the caravan routes shifted elsewhere and Petra was abandoned. The sounds of jackals and owls at night and the presence of scorpions under its rocks have given visitors (like Arab nomads) good reasons to avoid hanging around. The rarity of people staying long or inhabiting⁷ significantly this region is sufficient evidence for this prophecy's fulfillment.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S SUCCESSFUL INVASION OF PERSIA PREDICTED LONG IN ADVANCE

The prophet Daniel, writing during the period 605-536 b.c., predicted Greece would destroy the Persian Empire. Using a goat to stand for Greece, and a ram to symbolize Persia, he wrote:

While I was observing [in a prophetic vision], behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. And he came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. . . . So he [the goat] hurled him [the ram] to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. . . .

The ram which you saw with two horns represented the kings of Media and Persia. And the shaggy goat represented the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. (Dan. 8:5-7, 20-21; cf. Dan. 11:2-4).

Over two hundred years after Daniel's death, his inspired predictions came true. Alexander the Great invaded and conquered Persia during the years 334-330 b.c.

DANIEL PREDICTS THE DIVISION OF ALEXANDER'S EMPIRE

Daniel also foresaw the division of Alexander's empire into four parts, after the Macedonian conqueror's death:

Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns towards the four winds of heaven. . . . the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. And the broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power" (Dan. 8:8, 21-22).

Following Alexander the Great's sudden and early death, four of his generals divided up his empire. Ptolemy (Soter) took Egypt and Judea, Lysimachus

controlled Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Cassander got Greece and Macedonia, and Seleucus (Nicator) grabbed what is now Iraq and Syria on into Iran. This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter, since these kingdoms never reached the size or power of Alexander's empire, and Alexander died soon after conquering Persia at age 33. This was hardly a lucky guess. Daniel just as easily could have written that the Greek king's empire would be split up into a different number of parts, be defeated by Persia, or that Alexander would reign long.⁸

BUT WAS HISTORY MASQUERADING AS PROPHECY?

At this point, skeptics may argue that fulfilled prophecy is merely history in disguise. To avoid the ominous implications for their spiritual lives that these Hebrew prophets predicted the future accurately, they will postdate their books to some time after the events they predicted happened. (Of course, this concession admits the Bible isn't myths or fairy tales, but historically accurate in these cases). This argument suffers from some major objections. It assumes ahead of the fact (*a priori*) what it wishes to prove: Implicitly claiming there is no God and/or that He doesn't intervene in history, it asserts all fulfilled prophecies are actually history pretending to be prophecy. Therefore, the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc. were written centuries after their putative authors lived. This reasoning is actually circular, and ignores any contrary archeological or historical evidence raised against it. For example, because Daniel accurately describes in advance important events in Middle Eastern history down into the second century b.c., many higher critics conclude it had to be written in or finished by that century. Now about half of Daniel was written in the language of Aramaic. Since Aramaic changed over the centuries, much like English has since the time of Chaucer or even Shakespeare, documents written in it can be roughly dated. The skeptics ignore how its style, in vocabulary, structure, and syntax, doesn't fit the second century b.c. Consider the implications of the Elephantine Papyri of the fifth century b.c. The structure of their Aramaic more closely matches Daniel than the Aramaic of the Maccabean period of the second century. As Old Testament scholar Gleason L. Archer comments: "Hence these chapters [Dan. 2-7] could not have been composed as late as the second century or the third century, but rather--based on purely philological [language structure] grounds--they have to be dated in the fifth or late sixth century . . ."

WAS EZEKIEL WRITTEN IN THE EARLY SIXTH CENTURY B.C.?

Then consider the book of Ezekiel, which has been frequently cited above. Did Ezekiel write it and prophesy between about 597 b.c. and 570 b.c.? To claim someone else wrote this book ignores how, unlike other Biblical books, the personal pronoun "I" is used throughout. It contains commonly used

catch phrases, such as: "Then they will know that I am the Lord" (over 50 times), "As I live, says the Lord God" (13 times), "my sabbaths" (12 times), "countries" (24 times), "idols" (around 40 times), and "walking in my statutes" (11 times). Commonly, higher critics assert authors always keep the same literary style no matter what subject or time they write something. (If this kind of reasoning was always true, the English poet John Milton (1608-74) couldn't have written the poem "Paradise Lost," the poem "L'Allegro," and his political tracts). But here this kind of reasoning undermines their own arguments against the unity (single authorship) of Ezekiel. Although the authenticity of Ezekiel has been attacked for dating events by some year "of king Jehoiachin's captivity," more recently this has become an excellent argument for dating it to early in the sixth century b.c. During much of the time Ezekiel prophesied Zedekiah was king in Jerusalem. But the people of Judah considered Zedekiah (the uncle of Jehoiachin) as only a regent for Jehoiachin, who had been taken into captivity earlier by Nebuchadnezzar during an earlier assault on Judah. The archeological discovery of seal impressions on three jar handles that referred to "Eliakim steward of Jehoiachin" implies that Jehoiachin still had property in Judah despite being in exile. Ultimately, the only reason to believe Ezekiel didn't write Ezekiel are the assumptions of liberal skeptics who automatically disbelieve any book of the Bible was composed when it said it was: It would challenge their presuppositions that God doesn't exist and/or doesn't intervene in history.

THE HEBREW PROPHETS' PROPHECIES WERE CLEAR AND FULFILLED INDEPENDENTLY

The prophecies of the Hebrew prophets outlined above clearly are not ambiguous statements that can be interpreted in myriads of ways. They avoid (say) the deliberately obscure predictions of astrologers which allow for many widely varying events to "fulfill" them. Similarly, consider their differences from the ancient Greeks' Oracle at Delphi. At this shrine to the god Apollo, Croesus, the king of Lydia, asked the "prophetess" whether he should attack Persia, the empire next door. She replied: "If Croesus should make war on the Persians, he would destroy a mighty empire." This prediction encouraged Croesus to attack Persia--and he did indeed destroy a "mighty empire"--his own! In another case, Athenians argued over how to interpret one prediction by the prophetess at Delphi as the Persian king Xerxes's invading army threatened Greece. She predicted: "Yet Zeus the all-seeing grants to Athene's prayer that the wooden wall only shall not fall, but help you and your children."

The Athenians then debated whether the "wooden wall" referred to their navy protecting them or to the thorn-hedge that surrounded the Acropolis where the Parthenon stands today. Thanks to Themistocles, they opted for the former interpretation. They went on to win the naval battle of Salamis as a result (480 b.c.) In contrast, when Isaiah predicts Babylon would be destroyed and not inhabited again forever, no ambiguity exists: Either Babylon is or isn't destroyed. Either Babylon is or isn't inhabited again. Furthermore, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah were in no position to make sure their prophecies were

fulfilled. The cities and empires listed as destroyed or humbled above were finished off centuries later by non-Jewish nations in most cases, especially Greece, Rome, or the Arabs and Muslims. The prophecies were not self-fulfilling, but accomplished independently of any actions by the prophets themselves. The nation of Judah was unable to fulfill these for them. Since Judah lacked significant military power, it was prey for the great empires of the Middle East except when Yahweh intervened for it.⁹

FULFILLED PROPHECY AS GOD'S CHALLENGE TO THE SKEPTIC

Other prophecies could be related to the reader. Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24; Matt. 24:1-2) comes to mind. The longest single prophecy in the Bible, Daniel 11, is a remarkably detailed summary of centuries of struggles between the Selucid and Ptolemy dynasties after Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia and beyond. These predictions all confirm God's challenge to the skeptic:

"Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," the King of Jacob says. Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them, and know their outcome; or announce to us what is coming. Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods. (Isaiah 41:21-23)

Compare this to how successful today's supermarket tabloid psychics are. You will find they are normally wrong. (Just save a few pages of predictions out of one of these newspapers for a couple of years, and check them out against what actually happens). Remarkably, a minor nation's seers were routinely correct about the downfall and desolation of much more powerful enemies who worshipped (they believed) false gods. As McDowell describes:

There were many centers of religious worship in the ancient world: Memphis-Thebes, Babylon, Nineveh, and Jerusalem were among them. The pagan deities which men said claimed an equal footing with the One-God, Yahweh, never did last, especially after Jesus Christ. Yet Yahweh refused to even consider Himself on equal terms with these pagan gods, and even went further by condemning the cities in which these gods flourished. It is one thing to issue threats, but the point here is to look at history. Which city out of the above listed has remained?¹⁰

To say these specific predictions are all just lucky guesses is a self-deluding rationalization.

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

The sufficient criterion for the Bible's inspiration is fulfilled prophecy, since attributing successful long-term prophecies to guesswork is preposterous. This means the Bible's moral standards, such as on sexual morality, can't be lightly dismissed: The God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon and Nineveh, is very much alive and well. When facing what God has done to so many in the past who defied Him by worshipping false gods, we should consider putting our own lives in order. We Americans shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking we don't worship false gods. We don't worship Zeus, Apollo, Dagon, Baal, Asarte, Chemosh, Apis, Amon-Re, or Bel, but instead we worship money, power, sex without commitment, and the endless distractions produced by Western materialism and consumerism. If we don't repent, we'll meet the same fate. Furthermore, many of the end-time prophecies of the Bible found in the books of Daniel and Revelation could happen in our lifetimes. These books describe catastrophic disasters, as does Christ's Olivet prophecy (Matt. 24; Luke 21; Mark 13), that make the Second World War look like a firecracker by comparison, such as the great tribulation and the Day of the Lord. In the light of the above, they should not be scoffed at. The God who decreed doom in the past to Babylon, Nineveh, and Thebes could well do so today against London, Paris, New York, or Tokyo. Although Christ warns against setting dates (Matt. 24:36, 42), He said there would be general indications that His Second Coming was near:

Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Matt. 24:32-34)

Although the world today laughs at the thought of a wrathful God who punishes nations for their sins, the ruins of cities scattered throughout the Middle East bear witness that this is no laughing matter. The God of the Bible is a God of love (I John 4:16), as shown by His sacrifice by His Son's life for us (I John 3:16). But this same God hates sin. He demands that we repent from breaking His holy law (II Peter 3:9; Romans 6:12-16; 8:4). As the book of Revelation shows, the unrepentant during the Second Coming will meet the same fate as ancient Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt.

HOW CAN YOU JUDGE WHETHER THE BIBLE IS HISTORICALLY RELIABLE?

Concerning the trustworthiness of the Bible, how can its claims be analyzed, especially in comparison with (say) the Quran? The military historian C. Sanders developed three ways of evaluating the trustworthiness of any document historically: (1) the bibliographical test, (2) the internal evidence test, and (3) the external evidence test. The bibliographical test maintains that as there are more handwritten manuscript copies of an ancient historical document, the more reliable it is. It also states that the closer in time the oldest surviving manuscript is to the original first copy (autograph) of the author, the more reliable that document is. There is less time for distortions to creep into the text by scribes down through the generations copying by hand (before, in Europe, Gutenberg's perfection of printing using moveable type by c. 1440). The internal evidence test involves analyzing the document itself for contradictions and self-evident absurdities. How close in time and place the writer of the document was to the events and people he describes is examined: The bigger the gap, the less likely it is reliable. The external evidence test checks the document's reliability by comparing it to other documents on the same subjects, seeing whether its claims are different from theirs. Archeological evidence also figures into this test, since archeological discoveries in the Middle East have confirmed many Biblical sites and people. How do the Old and New Testaments stack up under these tests? Let's check them out!

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST APPLIED TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

By the two parts of the bibliographical test, the New Testament is the best attested ancient historical writing. Some 24,633 known copies (including fragments, lectionaries, etc.) exist, of which 5309 are in Greek. The Hebrew Old Testament has over 1700 copies (A more recent estimate is 6,000 copies, including fragments). By contrast, the document with the next highest number of copies is Homer's Iliad, with 643. Other writings by prominent ancient historians have far fewer copies: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 8; Herodotus, The Histories, 8; Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, 10; Livy, History from the Founding of the City, 20; Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars, 8. Tacitus was perhaps the best Roman historian. His Annals has at the most 20 surviving manuscript copies, and only 1 (!) copy endured of his minor works.

The large number of manuscripts is a reason for belief in the New Testament, not disbelief. Now, a skeptic could cite the 1908-12 Catholic Encyclopedia, which says "the greatest difficulty confronting the editor of the

New Testament is the endless variety of the documents at his disposal." Are these differences good reason for disbelief? After all, scholars (ideally) would have to sift through all of its ancient manuscripts to figure out what words were originally inspired to be there. In order to decide what to put into a printed version of the New Testament, they have to reconstruct a single text out of hundreds of manuscript witnesses. Actually, the higher manuscript evidence mounts, the easier it becomes to catch any errors that occurred by comparing them with one another. As F.F. Bruce observes:

Fortunately, if the great number of mss [manuscripts] increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared. The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.¹¹

Having over 5300 Greek manuscripts to work with, detecting scribal errors in the New Testament is more certain when comparing between its manuscripts than for the Caesar's Gallic Wars with its mere 10 copies, long a standard work of Latin teachers to use with beginning students. The science and art of textual criticism has an embarrassment--of riches--for the New Testament.¹²

HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHETHER THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A FIRST-CENTURY DOCUMENT?

Is there any evidence for the New Testament being written in the first century? After all, liberal scholars, atheists, and agnostics normally have said the New Testament was written long after the time Jesus and his disciples (students) lived. And if the New Testament was written around (say) the year A.D. 150, how could you trust what was in it? Since Jesus died in the year A.D. 31, a gap of a hundred or more years would mean that all the eyewitnesses would have died by then. You would be left with believing in stories passed down over three or more generations. This creates major obstacles to believing in it, as the game "whispering lane" implies. If you played this game in elementary school, you might remember how the first kid would be told a message by the teacher. Then the rest of the class would pass the message along from one kid to another. The final kid to hear it rarely, if ever, correctly got the full, original message. Does a similar problem confront believers in the New Testament when judging whether it is an accurate record for the life and ministry of Jesus and his disciples?

SCHOLARS MOVE AWAY FROM A SECOND-CENTURY DATE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

Recently among scholars a move away from a second-century

composition date for the New Testament has developed. For example, Biblical archeologist William Foxwell Albright remarks: "In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew [Luke presumably would be an exception--EVS] between the forties and eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75)." Elsewhere he states: "Thanks to the Qumran discoveries [meaning, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which first were uncovered in 1947 in the West Bank of Jordan], the New Testament proves to be in fact what it was formerly believed to be: the teaching of Christ and his immediate followers between cir. 25 and cir. 80 A.D." Scholar John A.T. Robertson (in Redating the New Testament) maintains that every New Testament book was written before 70 A.D., including even the Gospel of John and Revelation. He argues that no New Testament book mentions the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Rome, it must have been all written before that date. If the New Testament is a product of the first century, composed within one or two generations of Jesus' crucifixion, worries about the possible inaccuracies of oral transmission (people telling each other stories about Jesus between generations) are unjustified. As scholar Simon Kistemaker writes:

Normally, the accumulation of folklore among people of primitive culture takes many generations: it is a gradual process spread over centuries of time. But in conformity with the thinking of the form critic [a school of higher criticism that studies how oral transmission shaped the present organization of the New Testament], we must conclude that the Gospel stories were produced and collected within little more than one generation.¹³

HOW PEOPLE IN CULTURES MORE DEPENDENT ON ORAL TRADITION HAVE BETTER MEMORIES

In cultures where the written word and literacy are scarce commodities, where very few people able to read or afford to own any books, they develop much better memories about what they are told, unlike people in America and other Western countries today. For example, Alex Haley (the author of Roots) was able to travel to Africa, and hear a man in his ancestors' African tribe, whose job was to memorize his people's past, mention his ancestor Kunta Kinte's disappearance. In the Jewish culture in which Jesus and His disciples moved, the students of a rabbi had to memorize his words. Hence, Mishna, Aboth, ii, 8 reads: "A good pupil was like a plastered cistern that loses not a drop." The present-day Uppsala school of Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson analyzes Jesus' relationship with His disciples in the context of Jewish rabbinical practices of c. 200 A.D. Jesus, in the role of the authoritative teacher or rabbi, trained his disciples to believe in and remember His teachings. Because their culture was so strongly oriented towards oral transmission of knowledge, they could memorize amazing amounts of material by today's

standards. This culture's values emphasized the need of disciples to remember their teacher's teachings and deeds accurately, then to pass on this (now) tradition faithfully and as unaltered as possible to new disciples they make in the future. Paul's language in I Cor. 15:3-8 reflects this ethos, especially in verse 3: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . ." Correspondingly, the apostles were seen as having authority due to being eyewitness guardians of the tradition since they knew their Teacher well (cf. the criterion for choosing an apostle listed in Acts 1:21-22; cf. I Cor. 9:1). Furthermore, the words of Jesus were recorded within a few decades of His death while eyewitnesses, both friendly and hostile, still lived. These could easily publicly challenge any inaccuracies in circulation. As scholar Laurence McGinley writes: "The fact that the whole process took less than thirty years, and that its essential part was accomplished in a decade and a half, finds no parallel in any [oral] tradition to which the Synoptic Gospels [Mark, Luke, and Matthew] have been compared."

HOW THE BOOK OF ACTS IMPLIES THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN BEFORE C. 63 A.D.

A very straightforward argument for the date of the New Testament can be derived from the contents of Acts. The Gospel of Luke and Acts were originally one book, later divided into two. As a result, Luke was necessarily written a bit earlier than Acts. In turn, Luke is traditionally seen as having depended upon Mark over and above his own sources, so Mark was necessarily written still earlier. Furthermore, Matthew is normally seen as having been written after Mark but before Luke. Hence, if a firm date can be given to Acts, all of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Luke, and Matthew) had to have been composed still earlier. There are six good reasons to date Acts as being written by c. 63 A.D. First, Acts doesn't mention the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., despite much of its action focuses in and around that city. Only if it was written earlier does the omission of this incredibly disruptive event in the Holy Land make sense. Since in his Gospel Luke himself relates Jesus' predictions of Jerusalem's destruction in the Mount Olivet Prophecy (chapter 21), it's hard to believe he would overlook its fulfillment if he had written Acts after 70 A.D. Second, Nero's persecutions of the mid-60's aren't covered. Luke's general tone towards the Roman government was peaceful and calm, which wouldn't fit if Rome had just launched a major persecution campaign against the church. (The later book of Revelation has a very different spirit on this score, even if it is in symbolic prophetic code, since the Beast was Rome). Third, the martyrdoms of James (61 A.D.) as well as Paul and Peter (mid-60s A.D.) aren't mentioned in Acts. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100 A.D.) does record the death of James, so this event can be easily dated. Since these three men are leading figures in the Book of Acts, it would be curious to omit how they died, yet include the martyrdoms of other Christians like Stephen and James the brother of John. Fourth, the key conflicts and issues raised in the church that it records make sense in the context of a mainly Jewish Messianic Church centered on Jerusalem before 70 A.D. It describes disputes over

circumcision and admitting the gentiles into the church as having God's favor, the division between Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews (Acts 6:1), and the Holy Spirit falling on different ethnic groups (Jews followed by gentiles). These issues had a much lower priority after 70 A.D. than before. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. basically wiped out Jewish Christianity as a strong organized movement. Fifth, some of the phrases used in Acts are primitive and very early, such as "the Son of man," "the Servant of God" (to refer to Jesus), "the first day of the week," and "the people" (to refer to Jews). After 70 A.D., these expressions would need explanation, but before then they didn't in the Messianic Jewish Christian community. Finally, of course, the Jewish revolt against Rome starting in 66 A.D. that led to destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. isn't referred to in Acts despite its ultimately apocalyptic effects on the Jewish Christian community. Hence, judging from what the author included as important historically, if Acts was written about c. 63 A.D., the Gospel of Luke would be slightly older, and correspondingly Matthew and Mark probably should be dated to the mid-40s to mid-50s A.D.¹⁴ Paul's letters have to be older than Acts as well. This internal evidence points to a first-century date of composition for the New Testament; There's no need to find first-century manuscripts of the New Testament to know it was composed then.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WASN'T SUBJECT TO A LONG PERIOD OF ORAL TRADITION

Several reasons indicate that the New Testament wasn't subject to a long period of oral tradition, of people retelling each other stories over the generations. Let's assume the document scholars call "Q" did exist, which they say Matthew and Luke relied upon to write their Gospels. If "Q" can be dated to around 50 A.D. after Jesus's death in 31 A.D., little time remains in between for distortions to creep in due to failed memory. Furthermore, the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels were in an easily memorized, often poetic form in the original Aramaic. Then, since Paul was taken captive about 58 A.D., how he wrote to the Romans, Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Galatians indicates that he assumed they already had a detailed knowledge of Jesus. He almost never quotes Jesus' words his letters (besides in I Cor. 11:24-25). Hence, as James Martin commented:

As a matter of fact, there was no time for the Gospel story of Jesus to have been produced by legendary accretion. The growth of legend is always a slow and gradual thing. But in this instance the story of Jesus was being proclaimed, substantially as the Gospels now record it, simultaneously with the beginning of the Church.

Using the writing of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484-430 to 420 b.c.) as a test case, A.N. Sherwin-White, a University of Oxford scholar in ancient Roman and Greek history, studied the rate at which legend developed in the ancient world. Even two generations (c. 60+ years) is not enough to wipe out a solid foundation of historical facts, he argues. J. Warwick

Montgomery remarked that form criticism [a school of higher criticism] fails because "the time interval between the writing of the New Testament documents as we have them and the events of Jesus' life which they record is too brief to allow for communal redaction [editing] by the Church." Anderson adds, in a statement that higher critics must reckon with:

What is beyond dispute is that every attempt to date the Gospels late in the first century has now definitely failed, crushed under the weight of convincing evidence. If the majority of the five hundred witnesses to the resurrection were still alive around AD 55 . . . then our Gospels must have begun to appear when many who had seen and heard the earthly Jesus--including some of the apostles--were still available to confirm or question the traditions.¹⁵

Claims that the New Testament wasn't finished by c. 100 A.D. are simply untenable.

IT HAS A SHORTER GAP BETWEEN ITS ORIGINAL WRITING AND OLDEST EXTANT COPIES

As shown above, scholars have in recent decades increasingly discredited dates that make the New Testament a second-century document. As Albright comments: "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date[s] between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today."¹⁶ This development makes the time gap between the oldest surviving copies and the first manuscript much smaller for the New Testament than the pagan historical works cited earlier. The gap between its original copy (autograph) and the oldest still-preserved manuscript is 90 years or less, since most of the New Testament was first written before 70 A.D. and first-century fragments of it have been found. One fragment of John, dated to 125 A.D., was in the past cited as the earliest copy known of any part of the New Testament. But in 1972, nine possible fragments of the New Testament were found in a cave by the Dead Sea. Among these pieces, part of Mark was dated to around 50 A.D., Luke 57 A.D., and Acts from 66 A.D. Although this continues to be a source of dispute, there's no question the Dead Sea Scrolls document first century Judaism had ideas like early Christianity's. The earliest major manuscripts--Vaticanus and Sinaiticus--are dated to 325-50 A.D. and 350 A.D. respectively. By contrast, the time gap is much larger for the pagan works mentioned above. For Homer, the gap is 500 years (900 b.c. for the original writing, 400 b.c. for the oldest existing copy), Caesar, it's 900-1000 years (c. 100-44 b.c. to 900 A.D.), Herodotus, 1300 years (c. 480-425 b.c. to 900 A.D.) and Thucydides, 1300 years (c. 400 b.c. to 900 A.D.).¹⁷ Hence, the New Testament can be objectively judged more reliable than these pagan historical works both by having a much smaller time gap between its first writing and the oldest preserved copies, and in the number of ancient

handwritten copies. While the earliest manuscripts have a different text type from the bulk of later ones that have been preserved, their witness still powerfully testified for the New Testament's accurate preservation since these variations compose only a relatively small part of its text.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AS EVIDENCE FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT'S ACCURATE PRESERVATION

For the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries have shrunk the gap for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) at a stroke by a thousand years, though a gap of 1300 years or more remains. These discoveries still demonstrate faith in its accurate transmission is rational, since few mistakes crept in between about 100 b.c. and c. 900 A.D. for the book of Isaiah. For example, as Geisler and Nix explain, for the 166 words found in Isaiah 53, only 17 letters are in question when comparing the Masoretic (standard Hebrew) text of 916 A.D. and the Dead Sea Scrolls' main copy of Isaiah, copied about 125 b.c. Ten of these letters concern different spellings, so they don't affect meaning. Four more concern small stylistic changes like conjunctions. The last three letters add the word "light" to verse 11, which doesn't affect the verse's meaning much. The Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) also has this word. Thus, only one word in a chapter of 166 words can be questioned after a thousand years of transmission, of generations of scribes copying the work of previous scribes. Gleason Archer said the Dead Sea Scrolls' copies of Isaiah agree with the standard printed Masoretic Hebrew text "in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." Their discovery further justifies William Green's conclusion written nearly 50 years earlier: "It may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted."¹⁸ If it was so well preserved for this period of time (c. 100 b.c. to 900 A.D.) that previously wasn't checkable, it's hardly foolhardy to have faith that it was for an earlier period that still can't be checked.

DID MOSES WRITE THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE?

The Wellhausen/"Documentary"/J E P D theory claims Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch). Instead, it asserts that multiple authors or "sources" wrote them. (Here we're putting aside such issues as whether or not Moses used pre-existing sources for Genesis and Joshua's apparent writing of the postscript in Deut. 34 that describes Moses' death). Hence, the abbreviation comes from the hypothesis that one writer used "Jehovah" as a name for God, another wrote used "Elohim," another one developed the Priestly code, and finally one wrote Deuteronomy. This 19th century higher critic theory, was developed and restated especially in its standard form by the German scholar, Julius Wellhausen, in two books published in 1876 and 1878. The Documentary theory, which is another name by which Wellhausen's theory is known,

denies that Moses or any single human author wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (the five books of the Pentateuch). In the English-speaking academic world where religious liberals predominate in various schools of divinity, seminaries, and religious studies departments, this theory still holds sway by default, as if it were still 1880. The deep irony is that from a liberal theological perspective (i.e., one that denies the Bible was inspired by God) the somewhat newer Form Criticism school (as applied to the Old Testament) has generally blown the Documentary theory to bits! That is, later liberal scholarship basically wiped out earlier liberal scholarship concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch, but the "default setting" for religious liberals in the English-speaking world concerning the Pentateuch's authorship remains the Documentary theory basically as Wellhausen told it.

The Old Testament scholar, Gleason Archer, observes that the Documentary Theory is guilty of circular reasoning, in which it assumes what it is going to prove. (Circular reasoning, or "begging the question," is one of the hardest logical fallacies to spot). It assumes God didn't inspire the Bible ahead of experience (a priori), and then finds all sorts of ways to "explain" it based on that assumption. They dismissed the evidence for inspiration based on fulfilled prophecy, such as concerning Isaiah's prediction of Babylon's destruction and abandonment, or Daniel's concerning the career of Alexander the Great. Regardless of contrary textual or other evidence, they'll assume prophecy here is masquerading as history. Here they rule out in advance, before investigation, any possibility that the Bible had a supernatural origin based on philosophical assumptions, instead of open-mindedly following the evidence wherever it goes, whether it leads to a materialistic or supernatural explanation. Hence, since it's assumed that Moses didn't write the first five books of the Bible, the J E D P theorists have instead devised a clever theory of multiple uninspired sources mashed together by unknown editors ("redactors") in order to explain this piece of literature's origin. (Notice this theory is mostly about the purported origin of the text; it doesn't have as much to say about its meaning).

Supposedly also the Wellhausen theory is based on analyzing the data in the texts themselves, and then discerning that different authors wrote different parts of the same books based on stylistic variations in vocabulary, etc. However, whenever some textual data appears that doesn't fit the generalizations of J E D P theory, then suddenly the J E D P theorist calls upon unknown editors and commentators to "explain" (away) this (suddenly revealed) problem. For example, the Documentarians claimed the later historical books of the Bible never cited P (the Priestly legislative code) or a written Mosaic law until after the Jews were taken into exile by Babylon (586 b.c.) After various citations from the later historical books of the Bible were produced that proved they cited "P's" legal provisions and the Mosaic law, the advocates of J E D P theory replied (as Archer puts it), "Oh well, all

those references were later insertions made by priestly scribes who reworked these books after the exile." Archer explains well the procedure by which the Documentary theorists ignore the text that they are trying whose origins they are supposedly trying to explain: "This means that the same body of evidence which is relied upon to prove the theory is rejected when it conflicts with the theory. Or to put it another way, whenever the theory is opposed by the very data it is supposed to explain, the troubleshooting team of Redactor and Interpolator, Inc., is called to the rescue. Elusive tactics like these hardly beget justifiable confidence in the soundness of the result."¹⁹ Another way this assumption is shown to be shaky comes up when various scholars want to condense or add to these four purported sources in J E D P theory based upon their analysis of stylistic variations. For example, in 1924, the scholar Max Lohr very carefully examined the purported "P" material, and concluded this source couldn't be a source independent of "J" and "E."

A crucial assumption of the Documentary theory is that authors can't hardly vary their writing style (such as in their general choice of words), regardless of their subject matter or literary genre. Hence, they can't use more than one name for God, they can't use more than one style of writing, they can't restate the same ideas using synonyms, etc. If this "critical" technique was applied to modern pieces of literature, multiple "sources" could easily be purportedly "discovered" also. For example, in Ayn Rand's novel, "Atlas Shrugged" (1957) she has her lead character, John Galt, state in a long speech her basic philosophy, in eloquent, polemical language, without using a scholarly style. But earlier in the same novel, many of the same ideas are stated by another character, a certain bum who nearly got kicked off a train, in another, shorter speech. In this case, she uses a "blue collar" vocabulary, in which simpler, shorter words are used more casually in shorter sentences. Here she was almost writing in a kind of dialect by comparison with most of the rest of her novel, or perhaps somewhat like the novelist Sinclair Lewis, who was very skilled at capturing the crudities of average people's conversations. Now someone applying a technique like J E D P theory on "Atlas Shrugged" would easily "discover" that this novel had at least two authors because the vocabulary and sentence structure varied between these two sections. But this is patently absurd.

Archer uses another example to make the same point, which are the writing variations in the great English author John Milton: He wrote happy poems like "L'Allegro," serious, epic poetry like "Paradise Lost," and lively straightforward essays like "Areopagitica." If the 17th century Puritan Milton's works were treated like Moses' writings are by the Documentarians, they'd conclude no one man could write all these different ways based on their assumptions. As Archer wittily puts it: "If he had been an ancient Hebrew, at least, he would have been speedily carved up into the ABC multiple-source hypothesis!"²⁰ Read over this section dealing with the

Documentary theory: I vary in what I call the scholarly theory I'm rebutting here ever so briefly. Sometimes I call it Wellhausen's theory, the J E D P Theory, or the Documentary Theory. According to this theory's simple-minded analytical assumptions, that say the same writer can't vary his vocabulary choice between "Yahweh" and "Elohim," this essay section couldn't have been written by the same author either! Maybe it has then "multiple sources": When a sentence has "J E D P" theory in it, it has a different author than in sentence when it's called the "Documentary theory"! Ultimately, despite all the intimidating scholarly authority deployed that assumes the truth of Wellhausen's theory, it's patently absurd to assume the same author can't sometimes call God "Yahweh" and other times "Elohim." (Or, for that matter, "Adonai," which means "Lord," or any of God's other names).

Most troubling for J E D P theory, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (often abbreviated LXX), varies in a number of places concerning what the name of God is from the Hebrew original for the same verses. Since the LXX was often used by scholars to help determine the text of the autograph (original first written document based on textual criticism) of the Old Testament, this undermines any attempt to use the appearance of "Yahweh" or "Elohim" as a means of source division (authorship) within the Pentateuch. If "Kyrios" ("Lord" in Greek, the normal translation for the tetragammaton YHWH, "Yahweh") appears in the Greek, but "Elohim" ("God") happens to be in the Hebrew, or vice versa, how do we know the "Yahwist" wrote it instead of the "Elohist"? The J E D P theory ironically assumes the infallibility of the Hebrew text which religious liberals would otherwise totally deny. Instead, Archer sensibly observes that these two names for God are used in different contexts based on what characteristics of God the (human) author wished to emphasize. "Elohim" is the name of God used when emphasizing God is the Creator of the universe and the Lord over nature and mankind. By contrast, "Yahweh" (or "Jehovah" or "Lord" when translated from the YHWH) emphasizes God's covenant (or contractual) relationship with human beings.²¹ "Yahweh" as a name emphasizes that the God of the Bible is an intervening God, who visits His people, who actively rewards virtue and/or punishes sin.

Another assumption of J E D P theory includes the view that Hebrew religion was originally polytheistic (believing in multiple gods, like the ancient Greeks and Romans), but evolved over time to become monotheistic (believing in just one God). Since it's assumed that there is no God, and/or that God had nothing to do with writing the Bible, then the Documentarians read into various texts their views that Hebrew religion used to be polytheistic, but that this got rewritten or covered up by later writers (such as D or P). The Old Testament's own text itself lends no evidence for this view; these scholars just read their own evolutionary assumptions into its text. (Their assumed 19th century anthropology is now

known to be questionable: There's plenty of evidence now available that polytheistic religions may have degenerated from originally monotheistic religions in primeval times. The motif of the high god who is generally acknowledged as being in charge, but few worship him actively because he is said to not be actively concerned for his creation, is evidence for this position, such as from the stories told by the Aborigines of Australia).

The Documentary theory also assumes that whenever the Old Testament makes a historical statement, it shouldn't be believed or relied upon unless confirmed by a pagan historical source, such as one written by Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, etc. In point of fact, as shown by the well-known archeologist W.F. Albright, the Bible's historical record time and time again has been confirmed by archeological discoveries. Furthermore, the historical records kept by other civilizations had plenty of biases themselves far greater than anything attributable to the Old Testament, such as glorifying this or that king's reign and/or covering up his failures. By contrast, the Old Testament is extremely critical of the chosen people themselves who wrote it. For example, the moral failings of Abraham, Jacob, Samson, David, and Solomon are put on full display, which a typical non-objective historical book by ancient scribes of the same nation would downplay or omit entirely. So it's absurd to assume pagan historical sources are automatically more reliable than the Hebrew Bible a priori (ahead of experience) even on secular, objective criteria alone.

Archer also observes that ancient Semitic literature by other nations also has multiple cases of duplications and repetition by the same authors when writing narratives. So why is it assumed that the Hebrew Bible couldn't be written the same way? Fundamentally, the Documentary theory mistakenly reads modern day Western literary techniques into the ancient past. When they aren't used by the writers of the Hebrew Bible, it mistakenly concludes there are multiple authors for the same books, etc. While making this point, the scholar Johannes Pedersen totally dumped Wellhausen's theory altogether in his book "The Concept of the Old Testament" (1931). Archer summarized Pedersen's relevant argument this way: "It must be said that in general, J and E cannot be maintained as separate narratives without artificially imposing an Occidental [Western, non-Semitic] viewpoint upon the ancient Semitic narrative techniques and doing violence to Israelite psychology."²² So repetition is simply one way to emphasize a point, for example.

Let's now turn specifically but briefly to the Documentary theory's analysis of Genesis 1 and 2. The standard claim of J E D P theorists is that these chapters were originally two separate stories of creation written by two authors based (in part) on the fact they generally use different words for God, "Elohim" in Genesis 1 and "Yahweh" in Genesis 2. Of course, in the first five verses of Genesis 3 "Elohim" appears again, so does that mean

(very implausibly even if one is a disbelieving skeptic) that the author of Genesis 2 and 3:1-5 are different? Instead, the foundational error in the "two creation accounts" theory is a ignorance of the literary patterns of ancient Semitic literature, which often engaged in recapitulation like what's found in these two chapters. As Archer explains the narrative technique used in these two chapters: "The author would first introduce his account with a short statement summarizing the whole transaction, and then he would follow it up with a more detailed and circumstantial account when dealing with matters of special importance. To the author of Genesis 1-2, the human race was obviously the crowning, or climactic, product of creation, and it was only to be expected that he would devote a more extensive treatment to Adam after he had placed him in his historical setting (the sixth creative day)."²³ Genesis 2 supplies many more details about mankind's creation than Genesis 1 does, which merely mentions it in passing as part of a series of events during the first week of creation. So J E D P theory makes a number of assumptions in order to dispose of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. When these assumptions are analyzed carefully and dismissed, the traditional single author theory (granted the kinds of exceptions mentioned at the beginning of this section) becomes much more sensible than unverifiable attempts to figure out multiple anonymous authors based on purported stylistic variations.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH NEW TESTAMENT FORM CRITICISM

Turning now to the New Testament, Form Critics maintain the early church had little or no biographical interest in recording the details of Jesus' life, but was interested mainly in his sayings for the purposes of preaching. First, in reply, these critics evidently use a limited definition of "biography." Analyses by Stanton and Gundry show the Gospels were similar enough to Hellenistic (the ancient Greek world's) biographies so they can be included under that category. The sermons of the early church recorded in Acts routinely and integrally include biographical information about Jesus. C.H. Dodd has even argued that these sermons when describing Jesus' ministry use the same chronological order found in the Gospel of Mark. The manner in which Mark, for example, recorded the names of many individuals and specific geographical locations shows he wasn't creating a legend, myth, or literary piece, but (Barnes) "drew from a living tradition." Mark didn't note that Pilate was the Procurator of Judea, which was a particular matter of historical knowledge. Instead, he emphasized Pilate's belief that Jesus was innocent while on trial before him--a point of biographical interest, not general historical interest. As W.E. Barnes explains:

The Christian tradition which St. Mark followed had a vivid biographical memory. It told that Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, had borne the cross of Jesus, and it recorded the names of three of the women who saw Jesus

die--Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less, and Salome.

Those denying the Gospels are biographical implicitly assume that because they promote a certain (moral) message, they can't be historically accurate. In fact, moral analysis and the historical facts can be on the same side. Even in secular history, points about values can be made without corrupting or ignoring the facts: "The Holocaust shows why people shouldn't let anti-Semitism or racism go unchallenged publicly." Furthermore, why did the Church after the first generation supposedly suddenly develop such an interest in biographical details about Jesus' life, but lacked this earlier? After all, if they had the typical pagan mentality in their religious beliefs, maintaining myths were fine and actual historical events were unimportant, why did this abruptly change later? As Manson notes:

If the outline [the basic chronology of Jesus' life as found in the Gospels] had then to be created ad hoc [by improvisation], it can only be that for the thirty years between the end of the Ministry and the production of Mark, Christians in general were not interested in the story of the Ministry and allowed it to be forgotten. One would like to know why the first generation were not interested while the second generation demanded a continuous narrative [my emphasis here--EVS]. More than that, we need some explanation why it was possible for the details of the story [which would include what He said] to be remembered and the general outline forgotten. It is not the normal way of remembering important periods in our experience.²⁴

Since human nature is more consistent than this, it makes the notion that later Christians would be more interested in details of Jesus' life than earlier ones patently absurd.

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY UNDERMINES THE FORM CRITICS' ARGUMENTS

Form Critics and other skeptics also ignore the implications of Jesus' followers being eyewitnesses of His life. After his death, they could easily record what they remembered. Some clearly mentioned being eyewitnesses and desiring to accurately preserve what they saw (John 21:24; Heb. 2:3-4; II Pet. 1:16). What attitude could be more contrary to a mythmaker's and more of a historian's than Luke's?

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well,

having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Acts 1:1-4)

Eyewitness evidence is one of the best reasons for belief in the New Testament's inspiration. As Barnes notes:

When critics deny the preservation of an 'historical' (or, better, a 'biographical') tradition of the ministry of Jesus, they forget that Jesus had a mother who survived Him, and also devoted followers both women and men. Are we to believe that these stored up no memories of the words (and acts also) of the Master? And the Twelve--though they often misunderstood Him, would they not preserve among themselves either by happy recollection or by eager discussion many of His startling sayings and of His unexpected deeds?

Not only did friendly disciples observe Jesus' doings. Many hostile witnesses lived among non-Messianic Jews who wished to pounce on anything that could possibly be used against Christianity or its Founder.

Then were details added as oral transmission about Jesus' life proceeded down the generations? This claim goes against studies that show stories, when continually retold, become simpler, shorter, and increasingly apt to omit specific details like place names. For example, E.L. Abel observes: "Contrary to the conclusions derived from Form Criticism, studies of rumor transmission indicate that as information is transmitted, the general form or outline of a story remains intact, but fewer words and fewer original details are preserved."²⁵ Once the New Testament is seen as a document composed by eyewitnesses, those they talked to, and could be easily critiqued by hostile ones, skeptical attacks on its reliability take a nose dive.

WHY SHOULD THIS EYEWITNESS EVIDENCE BE BELIEVED?

There are special reasons for believing in the reliability of the New Testament authors. A document is more apt to be reliable when it is a personal letter, was intended for a small audience, was written in a rough, unpolished literary style, and contains rather irrelevant information such as lists of details such as the names of individuals. Although a document can lack these characteristics and still be perfectly sound historically, they still remain prima facie powerful points in favor of a document being accurate when its origin is unclear. When something is written for propagandistic efforts among a vast audience, it's more likely to shade the truth or omit inconvenient, embarrassing facts. Now much of the New Testament is made up of letters intended for small churches or individuals, especially Paul's, which sometimes reflect rather hurried writing (consider I Corinthians and Galatians, both of which are pervaded by a crisis atmosphere). Mostly written in the rough koine Greek of

average people, it contains inconsequential details even in the Gospels which were intended for a broad audience (see John 21:2, 11; Mark 14:51-52). The sixteenth chapter of the Letter (epistle) to the Romans is largely taken up with Paul's greetings and instructions to various individuals. Furthermore, eyewitnesses who have much to lose and little to gain from telling what they saw are reliable. The Jewish Christians of the first century, persecuted by their kinsmen, often paid for their beliefs with their lives. Eleven of the twelve apostles died martyrs' deaths, according to reasonably reliable tradition: How did they benefit materially from proclaiming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah? Paul mentioned the many trials he endured for proclaiming the gospel (II Cor. 11:23-28). If the goal was to make lots of converts to makes lots of money, the apostles could easily have found easier and safer messages to preach by changing their beliefs. This Paul refused to do: "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision [he didn't], why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" (Gal. 5:11). Being Jews, if they proclaimed falsehoods about God, they had every reason to fear their God's wrath in the hereafter, so they had strong motives for telling the truth about the God they worshiped. Christianity emerged from Judaism's capital, Jerusalem and its vicinity: If the Gospels' portrait of Jesus was seriously wrong, then-living hostile witnesses (which were hardly few in number) could have easily shot it down. Peter and company didn't pack up and go to (say) Athens and start proclaiming the Gospel far away from where anybody could easily check up on their assertions, but started in Jerusalem within weeks of Jesus' death on Pentecost. All in all, these eyewitnesses proclaimed the truth as they knew it, having strong reasons for doing so: Who dies for a lie, knowing that it is a lie?²⁶

ANCIENT PEOPLE KNEW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FABLES

Some today may believe that the educated people of the ancient world didn't have a real grasp of the difference between the facts of what really happened and telling moral stories to make points. In reality, ancient pagan historians of the West clearly knew the difference, even if they weren't always sufficiently critical of their sources. Herodotus didn't automatically believe his sources, and did emphasize the role of eyewitnesses. Although Thucydides presumably did invent most of the speeches found in his history of the Peloponnesian War, he still attempted to have them express the views of the speakers. He never felt free to invent any of the narrative. Lucian believed the historian's only task was to tell the story as it really happened, and Cicero thought similarly. Polybius advocated judging eyewitnesses and analyzing sources. More careful than most, Tacitus did attempt to test his sources and to avoid intentionally distorting what information he had received. The Jewish rabbinical tradition had a similar respect for what had really happened: The duty of the disciples of a rabbi was to pass on accurately what they had learned from their teacher, as described above. Josephus stated his commitment to being accurate and truthful, trying also to correct mistaken sources.

A standard higher critic view of the New Testament says the church made up stories about Jesus' life and teachings over the decades after His death because of later controversies it suffered. In fact, much indicates Jesus expressed Himself differently from how His disciples did. Jesus used questions and the Aramaic words "amen" and "abba" in unique ways. Sixty-four times Jesus uses threefold expressions (such as ask, seek, knock). He uses passive verbs when referring to God, such as in this case: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father" (Matt. 11:27). Paul, Peter, etc. did not copy His use of "how much more," "which of you," and "disciple." Often when Jesus' words, as written in Greek, are translated back into Aramaic, literary qualities such as parallelism, alliteration, and assonance appear. Greek-speaking gentile disciples could not have fabricated His speeches whole cloth since their poetic quality in Aramaic can't be accidental. Also, if the church had created Jesus' ideas decades later, why is it that "Jesus" never was made to comment on major controversies that divided the church? The Jesus of the Gospels says little or nothing about circumcision, specific gifts of the Holy Spirit, food laws, baptism, evangelizing the gentiles, rules controlling church meetings, and relations between the church and state. Paul almost never quotes Jesus directly: If he felt free to make up stories about Jesus, he could have easily and directly justified what he did by manufacturing sayings supposedly by Jesus. (Some Muslims through the centuries evidently didn't hesitate to do this for the hadiths (traditional sayings) of Muhammad, "discovering" quotes convenient for the doctrinal or political controversies of the moment!)

Jesus' life and ideas also had aspects that were problematic, even embarrassing, starting with the deep shame of being executed by crucifixion. (Roman citizens had the right of being beheaded instead!) Facing opposition from within His own family, Jesus was a mere carpenter, not someone materially rich or powerful. Jesus had views about legalism, divorce, fasting, women, and sinners that certainly presented stumbling blocks to mainstream Jews. Similar to the Old Testament's portrayal of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, and Elijah, the New Testament repeatedly and plainly describes the sins and personal flaws of the disciples, such as Peter denying Christ three times and their arguments over who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Surely, if the church concocted the New Testament to spread its message about Jesus, editing out embarrassing facts about its founders should have been a top priority! If you invented a historical document to promote your beliefs, you could come up with something more favorable to your cause's leaders than this! The unfavorable facts about Christianity found in the New Testament show its early leaders didn't feel free to rewrite history or ignore historical facts, and the New Testament's contents point to a pre-70 A.D. date of composition.²⁷

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE RECEIVED AND CRITICAL TEXTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

To undermine people's belief in the New Testament, someone could seize upon the long running dispute between the advocates of the Westcott-

Hort/"Critical" (Alexandrine and Western) text and the Received (Byzantine) text. By citing extremists in this debate, a skeptic can make the differences in the New Testament's Greek manuscripts seem worse than they really are. The Critical text basically underlies almost all modern Bible translations, while the Received text underlies the King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV). The basic dispute involves a trade-off of two competing, conflicting claims. On the one hand, far more Greek manuscripts reflect the Received text. About 80-90% have this text type, but they are mostly later manuscripts. On the other hand, the earliest major manuscripts, such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus from the fourth century, reflect the Critical text type, but they are much fewer in number. The biggest differences between the two concern the last twelve verses of Mark (16:9-20) and the episode of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). The Critical text omits them, but the Received text contains them. The dispute concerns (by McDowell and Stewart's account) 10% of the text, a figure that seems high, judging from some of the statements found below.²⁸ Furthermore, the Vaticanus manuscript, which is one of the foundational texts for the Critical (Alexandrine) text, undercuts its own evidence omitting Mark's last twelve verses. It (called "B" by scholars) has a blank column of the right size where the last twelve verses of Mark would have been, showing the original scribe knew something was missing. Before Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were copied (c. 350 A.D.), Catholic Church Fathers also cited from Mark's last twelve verses, such as Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. The early Old Latin and Syriac translations also contain them. Altogether, since these sources were copied originally in the second or third centuries, before Vaticanus or Sinaiticus were in the fourth, excellent evidence exists for Mark originally writing them.²⁹ Importantly, the disputed territory (the 10%) can be further reduced after accepting arguments for the Received text's reliability (such as for the last twelve verses of Mark). Debates over 10% of the New Testament's text is a poor reason for doubting all of it, especially when no major doctrines hinge on this controversy's outcome.

HOW MANY MANUSCRIPTS HELPS ELIMINATE NEW TESTAMENT VARIATIONS

Forlong's Encyclopedia of Religion says 150,000 variations have been computed to exist among the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Do they justify doubts about its textual reliability? True, since it has such a vast number of handwritten copies, a large number of scribal errors are inevitable. Having more manuscripts than any other anciently preserved document before the invention of printing and moveable type (in Europe), this reality should be regarded as producing more benefits than drawbacks. As scholars C.F. Sitterly and J.H. Greenlee comment:

Such a wealth of evidence makes it all the more certain that the original words of the NT [New Testament] have been preserved somewhere within the MSS [manuscripts]. Conjectural emendation (suggesting a reading that is not

found in any MS [manuscript]), to which editors have restored in the restoration of other ancient writings, has almost no place in the textual criticism of the NT. The materials are so abundant that at times the difficulty is to select the correct rendering from a number of variant readings in the MSS.

HOW THE SCIENCE OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM CAN RULE OUT VARIATIONS WITH CERTAINTY

Having faith that the scribes preserved the New Testament accurately is rational because most of the variations between manuscripts can be ruled out by using the principles of textual criticism. By its standards, such a flawed text as I John 5:7's Trinitarian interpolation sticks out like a sore thumb. Very few Greek manuscripts contain it (exactly two, one from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, and the other from the sixteenth). Even the earliest copies of the Latin Vulgate omit it. Furthermore, most of the "200,000 variations" (by another, more recent count) are spelling mistakes, homophones (such as in English, "two," "too," "to"), words accidentally repeated twice by scribes, etc. For example, if the same word is misspelled 3000 times, that counts for 3000 variations. The number of significant variations is relatively few. Ezra Abbott maintains 19/20ths of New Testament variations have so little support that they can be automatically ruled out. Scholars Geisler and Nix, building upon the work of F.J.A. Hort, say only about 1/8 have weight, and 1/60 are "substantial variations." Ironically, the high number of copies allows more scribal errors to develop while simultaneously providing the antidote for their elimination. The more the copies, the easier it is to find and delete mistakes. By contrast, since Caesar's Gallic Wars has a mere 10 copies, it might be harder to find the correct original text among the surviving old manuscripts. Philip Schaff declares that only 400 of all the 150,000 variations he knew of caused doubt on textual meaning. Only 50 were of great significance. Even then, no variation altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of scripture teaching." A citation of Sir Robert Anderson's found in The Bible and Modern Criticism explains how groundless are the worries about textual difficulties in the New Testament:

All of them face that formidable phantom of textual criticism, with its 120,000 various readings in the New Testament alone, and will enable us to march up to it, and discover that it is empty air; that still we may say with the boldest and acutest of English [textual] critics, Bentley, 'choose (out of the whole MSS) as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design out of the whole lump of readings, and not one article of faith or moral precept is either perverted or lost in them. Put them [the different readings] into the hands of a knave or a fool [to choose], and even with the most sinistrous and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, or so

disguise Christianity but that every feature of it will still be the same.³⁰

Simply put, nothing major is at risk in the debate between the Critical and Received texts. (I think the Received text decisively wins this dispute, which means the real number of variations is far lower than 10%, but there's not the space to prove that here).

THE AVERAGE PEOPLE OF JUDEA COULD HAVE KNOWN GREEK

Who really wrote the Gospels? They were written in Greek. Could have the simple fishermen and other disciples of Jesus, Jews one and all, have known Greek? It has been claimed that scholarly gentile Catholic monks and/or church fathers of later centuries really wrote the four stories of Christ's life and ministry found in the New Testament. This simply isn't true. First, although it was written in Greek, the New Testament reflects Semitic (not Greek gentile) language patterns, over and above the many scattered Aramaic and Hebrew words found on its pages. Semitic languages, such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, differ sharply from Indo-European languages, such as French, Greek, English, German, and Russian. As a result, it would be easy to expose any attempts by any later gentile writers who were ignorant of Aramaic and/or Hebrew to pretend they were Jews by analyzing how they wrote the Greek of the New Testament. As William Most notes concerning Luke's Gospel:

All scholars know and admit that the Greek of Luke's Gospel shows far more Semitisms than do the Gospels written by Semites. A Semitism consists in bringing some features of Semitic speech or structure into Greek, where it does not really belong. For example, in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Mark's Gospel is content to merely say that after the first servant was mistreated, the master "sent another," and later again, "he sent another." But Luke 20:9-12 reads oddly, "And he added to send another servant"; and later, he added to send a third." The language sounds stilted in English, and so did it in Greek. The reason is evident. Hebrew, in such a sentence, would use the root ysf, to add. So we can see Luke, who is not a Semite, is taking care to reproduce the precise structure of his source, a Hebrew source, although Mark, who was a Semite [i.e., a Jew], did not do it.

Another example of Luke employing Semitic language patterns was to use "the Hebrew (not Aramaic) construction called apodotic wau (which becomes apodotic kai in Greek, if used)." For example, in Luke 5:1, in Most's literal translation, this construction appears: "It happened, when the crowd pressed on Him to hear the word of God, AND He stood by the lake." Inserting that "and" between an opening subordinate clause to connect it with the main clause

sounds funny in Greek, not just English. Luke does this about 20-25% of the possible times it could happen, which evidently means he depended on a Hebrew-speaking source that often. He was so careful in using his Hebrew sources, he choose to reproduce literally what are rather clumsy grammatical patterns in Greek!

THE JEWISH FLAVOR AND LANGUAGE OF THE GOSPELS

The words that definitely or are likely Aramaic appearing in the Gospels are further proof of their Semitic (Jewish) flavor. These include "abba" (father), "talitha cum," (maid arise), "Bar" (son), "perisha" (separated one), "hakel dema" (bloody ground), "shiloha" (Siloam), "reka" ("raca"--silly fool), "kepha" (rock), "toma" (Thomas), and "rabbuni" (rabboni). Even more Hebrew words than Aramaic ones appear in the Gospels. These include "levonah," (frankincense), "mammon," (money), "moreh," (rebel), "bath," (a unit of wet measure), "mor," (myrrh), "cammon," (cummin), "zuneem," (tares), "sheekmah," (sycamore), "Wai," (Woe!), "amen," "rabbi," "corban," and "Satan." Although the routine, everyday language of Jesus and His disciples was most likely Aramaic, they still could have known other languages. In recent years, newly uncovered evidence indicates that Hebrew still was a language in common, everyday use in Judea in the time of Roman rule. Consequently, McDowell and Wilson say there are "good indications" that Jesus and his disciples were trilingual. Greek was the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean during Roman rule. At that time, Hellenistic (Greek cultural) influences penetrated deeply into ancient Judea, including its language. Much like English increasingly has become late in this century, Greek was the language of "default" for educated people of different nationalities. When neither knows the native mother tongue of the other, they used it to communicate when encountering each other abroad or in their home territories. (English is the language for air traffic controllers at major international airports, regardless of their location or where the jet airliners land or take off).

MORE EVIDENCE JUDEA'S JEWS OFTEN COULD SPEAK GREEK

Consider the witness of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus:

I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language . . . for our nation does not encourage those who learnt the languages of other nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment [mastering Greek] as common, not only to all sorts of freemen, but to as many of the servants [slaves?] as pleased to learn them.

Josephus doesn't say the Jews felt only the scholarly learned Greek. Instead, he

says no incentive existed to learn it as a mark of educational distinction because many common people could speak it in Judea. Another scholar confirms Josephus's account: "Although the main body of the Jewish people rejected Hellenism and its ways, intercourse with the Greek peoples and the use of the Greek language was by no means eschewed." Jesus himself must have spoken Greek. For example, in John 21, Jesus used two different words for "love," and two different ones for "know." Neither of these pairs can be replicated in Aramaic or Hebrew. Nor can the word play on the word for "rock" or "stone" (for the Greek words "petros" and "petra") in Matt. 16:18 be reproduced in these two Semitic languages. When conversing with the gentile Greek-speaking Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-28, Jesus used a diminutive Greek word (like "doggie" in English) for dogs that meant household pets, not strays or wild dogs. (This obviously softened His use of a traditional Jewish term of contempt, "dogs," for gentiles).³¹ Since Greek was in common use by average Jews like fishermen, then, unsurprisingly, the disciples composed the New Testament in it in order to communicate with others in the wider eastern Mediterranean community about Jesus and His teachings.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS NOT WRITTEN IN A HIGHLY SCHOLARLY GREEK

Was the Greek of the New Testament fluent and well done, such as a scholar might write? Or was it composed in the rough hewn language of the common people? The New Testament was basically written in the koine Greek of the average people of the Roman empire, not the classical Greek of the philosophers Plato (c. 428-348 b.c.) and Aristotle (384-322 b.c.), or the Athens of Pericles (c. 495-427 b.c.). Did a gentile write the book of Acts in a very polished Greek? Although Luke was a gentile, he generally used the koine for Acts. As historian Robin Fox, no friend of Christianity, explains:

[Paul's] companion, the author of Acts [i.e., Luke], has also been mistaken for a Hellenistic historian and a man of considerable literary culture; in fact, he has no great acquaintance with literary style, and when he tries to give a speech to [by?] a trained pagan orator, he falls away into clumsiness after a few good phrases. His literary gifts lay, rather, with the Greek translation of Scripture, the Septuagint, which he knew in depth and exploited freely: to pagans, its style was impossibly barbarous.³²

Although Luke could write in a highly literary vein sometimes, such as in the parable of the prodigal son, he wrote other ways as well. The Holy Spirit allowed the distinct literary styles of different authors to shine through, even as it protected them from writing errors or contradictions. The apostle Paul clearly wrote differently from the apostles John or Peter, yet the Holy Spirit guarded them all against mistakes. The New Testament was written so average people could hear the Good News ("Gospel") of Jesus Christ. Thus, not having

a highly scholarly or polished style, the New Testament was composed in the everyday, semi-universal language of the Roman empire, koine Greek.³³

HOW CAN YOU BE CERTAIN THAT THE RIGHT BOOKS ARE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

What books should be in the New Testament? This subject raises the issue of the canon, which concerns which books should and shouldn't be in it. After all, up to 200 various "Gospels" floated around in the ancient Roman Empire. These apocryphal (so-called "missing") books boasted such titles as "The Shepherd of Hermas," "The Gospel of Peter," "The Gospel of Thomas," etc. Why should Christians believe only four Gospels were inspired by God? Since apocryphal books' quality is much lower and/or their teachings so greatly vary from the canonical books, they can be easily dismissed from serious consideration. The Christian community followed implicitly (at least) the procedure of Deuteronomy 13:1-5. This Old Testament text says that later revelations--here specifically ones about following false gods--which contradict previous ones are automatically invalid, even when the false prophet made some accurate predictions. Some of the apocryphal gospels supported the Gnostic cause. Claiming the Old Testament's God was evil and totally different from the New Testament's God, the Gnostics also denied Jesus had a body of flesh and blood before His crucifixion. Since their teachings totally contradict the Gospels and Letters (epistles) of the New Testament, not to mention the Old Testament, their writings could automatically be stamped heretical and rejected as fraudulent. As F.F. Bruce explains:

The gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose. A comparison of the New Testament writings with the contents of The Nag Hammadi Library [a collection of ancient Gnostic books discovered in 1945 in Egypt] should be instructive, once the novelty of the latter is not allowed to weigh in its favour against the familiarity of the former.

Similarly, James comments: "There is no question of any one's having excluded them from the New Testament: They have done that for themselves."

Scholar Milligan remarks: "We have only to compare our New Testament books as a whole with other literature of the kind to realise how wide is the gulf which separates them from it. The uncanonical gospels, it is often said, are in reality the best evidence for the canonical." And Aland maintains: "It cannot be said of a single writing preserved to us from the early period of the church outside the New Testament that it could properly be added today to the Canon." For these reasons it's absurd to claim that the Gospel of Peter's account of Jesus being resurrected on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread (which is a historical inaccuracy) proves the other four Gospels are wrong. Instead, the Gospel of Peter is simply false: It is just one document written later than the earlier four canonical Gospels. It also contains the false Gnostic/docetic teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh. Even judging by secular criteria,

the four Gospels are far more likely to be historically reliable. Furthermore, archeological discoveries have repeatedly sustained Luke's reliability as a historian. Their collective witness against this historical mistake found in "The Gospel of Peter" should be seen as decisive.

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND REACTIONS AGAINST HERESY MAKE THE CANON CLEAR

In evident reaction against the heretic (and Gnostic) Marcion's (c. 140 A.D.) attempt to edit the canon, lists of the canonical books were made from the late second century onwards. These lists, even from the beginning, contain most of the books found in the New Testament today. The author of the Muratorian fragment (c. 170 A.D.), Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.), Clement (c. 190 A.D.), Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.), Origen (c. 230 A.D.), Eusebius (c. 310 A.D.), and Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 348 A.D.) all compiled lists of canonical books. Furthermore, a fundamentally false skeptical assumption must be avoided: The Gospels are not canonical because the church decreed them to be authoritative, but because they are inspired, the church accepted them as having authority. A leading criterion for the church to accept a book as scripture was whether the church believed an apostle (Paul, John, Matthew, James) or someone associated with an apostle (traditionally, Mark was seen as associated with Peter, and Luke with Paul) wrote it. Nothing written after c. 100 A.D. made it into the canon. Only the books written within a generation or two of Jesus' death were deemed proper to include in the canon. What mattered was apostolic authority, not just authorship. Thus, N.B. Stonehouse says: "In the Epistles [Letters, such as by Paul] there is consistent recognition that in the church there is only one absolute authority, the authority of the Lord himself. Wherever the apostles speak with authority, they do so as exercising the Lord's authority."³⁴ High levels of skepticism about the New Testament's canon simply aren't justified.

WAS THE CANON DETERMINED FROM THE TOP-DOWN BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S HIERARCHY?

Did the Roman Catholic Church chose the canon? It claims this, but this wasn't true. First of all, it is quite problematic to label "Roman Catholic" the persecuted Sunday-keeping church that survived before the time the Roman Emperor Constantine granted toleration through the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313). The increasing union of church and state in the fourth century and afterwards inevitably caused Rome to corrupt doctrinally and spiritually the church. Second, the Roman Catholic Church's leadership (which is the crucial issue) did not choose the canon, and then impose it from the top down. Instead, the Greek-speaking eastern churches showed their independence of the Bishop of Rome. Many of them, at least in Asia Minor (now Turkey), held onto seventh-day Sabbatarianism (Saturday observance) and a Passover (not Easter) communion for many years after 100 A.D., showing they were corrupted at a later date. Furthermore, this claim ignores how God can move men who are

not true believers to make the right decisions. Would God be so careless to let those with false doctrines ultimately pervert His holy word? Similarly, the Old Testament was preserved and had the right books placed in it despite Israel often fell into idolatry and later rejected the Messiah as a nation. For secular historians of ancient history to even be able to do their jobs, they have to assume the texts they analyze have a certain amount of reliability themselves, so both Christians and unbelievers share this kind of faith some. Finally, the Sunday-observing Church before the time of Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan was hardly a tightly controlled, highly organized, monolithic group. It had suffered terrible persecution during the rule of Diocletian (284-305 A.D.) and earlier emperors.

JEROME, THE LATIN VULGATE'S TRANSLATOR, REFERS TO A BOTTOM-UP DETERMINATION

Consider this statement by Jerome (c. 374-419 A.D.) who translated the Latin Vulgate Bible (at least for the Gospels and Old Testament). Even in the year 414 A.D., as he wrote to Dardanus, the prefect of Gaul (modern France), it shows the lack of top-down uniformity in the Catholic Church on the canon, long after the pro-Trinitarian Council of Nicea (325 A.D.):

This must be said to our people, that the epistle which is entitled 'To the Hebrews' is accepted as the apostle Paul's not only by the churches of the east but by all church writers in the Greek language of earlier times [note that he doesn't consider papal authority or synods of bishops as determining the canon's contents!--EVS], although many judge it to be by Barnabas. It is of no great moment who the author is, since it is the work of a churchman and received recognition day by day in the churches' public reading [again, this clearly denies a top-down approach--EVS]. If the custom of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical scriptures, neither, by the same liberty, do the churches of the Greeks accept John's Apocalypse [the Book of Revelation]. Yet we accept them both, not following the custom of the present time [which denies as binding the authority of recent council decisions, such as that of Hippo Regius in 393 and Carthage in 397, or the papal decree of 405--EVS] but the precedent of early writers [notice!], who generally make free use of testimonies from both works.

This statement shows the canon came from the traditional practices of laymembers, elders, and writers--from the bottom up. As scholar Kurt Aland remarks: "It goes without saying that the Church, understood as the entire body of believers, created the canon . . . it was not the reverse; it was not

imposed from the top, be it by bishops or synods."

PERSECUTION BY ROME HELPS DETERMINE THE CANON

Persecution was a major factor in forming the canon, especially the campaign lasting 10 years (cf. Rev. 2:10) unleashed by the Roman emperor Diocletian starting in 303 A.D. During those years the Roman government for the first time specifically targeted for destruction all copies of the New Testament. Believers in the scattered congregations throughout the empire had to know which religious documents they had they could hand over and which ones they should resist surrendering, even if that cost them their lives. As Bruce notes, handing over "a copy of the Shepherd of Hermas or a manual of church order" might be permissible if that would satisfy the Roman police for a time, but sacred Scripture never would be O.K. to give up voluntarily. "But for Christians who were ordered to hand over books it must have become important to know which books must on no account be surrendered and those which might reasonably be regarded as 'not worth dying for."³⁵ Decentralized decision-making for each congregation, or a group of congregations under one bishop, was the order of the day after local Roman officials launched their attacks. They show papal decrees or synods of bishops did not create the canon when they proclaimed its contents in the mid to late fourth century and early fifth centuries. Instead, the bishops or the Pope merely ratified pre-existing practice over the centuries and decades by multitudes of laymembers, elders, and church writers scattered within the confines of a vast empire.³⁶

3

HOW EXTERNAL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE CONFIRMS THE BIBLE

Now let's turn to the external evidence test for the reliability of the Bible. Being the second of Sanders's approaches to analyzing historical documents, it consists of checking whether verifiable statements made in some text from the past correlate with other evidence, such as that in other historical writings or from archeological discoveries. Is this hard to do for the New or Old Testaments? True, not one of Jesus' specific miracles can be checked in sources outside the New Testament. Here, just as for the events of many other historical documents, eyewitness testimony is accepted as proof that they did happen. Consider this historical fact: "Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 b.c." How can you know whether it is true? After all, nobody alive today saw it happen. It's not like science, in which a scientist can go out and repeat experiments to see if one of nature's laws is true, such as the law of gravity. Fundamentally, it comes down to trusting as reliable what somebody wrote centuries ago about some event. When considering whether the New Testament is reliable, it's necessary to have faith in what some men wrote centuries ago, around 40-100 A.D., about Jesus and the early church. But this is not a blind faith, nor anything ultimately different from what secular historians studying the ancient past have to do. They too must have the "faith" that the documents of earlier times they analyze are basically trustworthy, or otherwise history writing isn't possible. Having automatic skepticism about the New Testament's historical accuracy because it is a religious book is simply the prejudice of a secular mentality. Instead, let's investigate its reliability empirically, like a historian might with a non-religious document. Does other

evidence confirm what is written in it, like archeological evidence or ancient historical writings by Jews or pagans? Its accounts of Jesus' and others' miracles should not make people automatically skeptical of whether it is true. While it may be true you or I have never seen a miraculous healing or someone raised from the dead, that doesn't prove nobody else ever has. Many important events happen all the time, such as (foreign) earthquakes, coups, floods, elections, and assassinations that many never have witnessed personally, but they still believe others have experienced them. Instead of ruling out in advance the Bible's record of miracles as impossible before examining the evidence, you should think that if other events or places of the New or Old Testaments can be confirmed, then it's sensible to infer the miracles they record also occurred.

HOW FAITH IN THE BIBLE INVOLVES AN INFERENCE LIKE A SCIENTIST'S

Fundamentally, the process of examining whether the Bible is God's word involves an inference from what parts can be shown to be historically reliable by archeology and other historical writings, and from its fulfilled prophecies, to saying ALL of the Bible is inspired. You cannot prove all Bible's statements independently of the Bible--but then, you can't do this either for any other major ancient historical document. If humanity could figure it all out by reason alone, God really wouldn't need to give us revelation to begin with. Human reason can't tell us the purpose of life, what happens after death, or give us moral guidance besides a few crude basics: Therefore, revelation is necessary. The intelligent Christian's faith involves an extrapolation very similar to a physical scientist's. The chemist (say) believes that because such and so chemicals interact in a certain way in his or her lab, that therefore all of the same chemicals in the same circumstances throughout the earth (or even universe) will interact in the same way again. But, of course, he or she hasn't checked all the same chemicals throughout the earth to be 100% certain that the same results will always happen long into the future. Similarly, the informed Christian performs a similar inference. He or she says that since the Bible's already fulfilled prophecies could only sensibly have a supernatural origin, and since it has no proven historical mistakes in what parts can be checked, therefore, the whole Bible is inspired. Clearly, faith is still involved, because only a relatively small part of the Bible consists of already fulfilled prophecies and historical statements that can be compared against other records or archeological discoveries. Nevertheless, making this inference is perfectly rational. Belief in the Bible need not be an operation in blind faith, since God has left enough evidence for us to believe "beyond a reasonable doubt," but not so much that any and all challenges by disbelievers can be refuted with 100% certainty. So mankind should seek not 100% certainty in its religious convictions, but enough evidence so they are supported "beyond a reasonable doubt." We should not demand of God more evidence for determining our religious beliefs than we use for other major decisions in life, such as choosing a career or mate.

APPLYING THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Let's consider the external evidence test as applied to the Old Testament. About the Old Testament, higher critics time and again have made skeptical, even dogmatic statements against its historical reliability. Thanks to archeological discoveries over the past two centuries, they have been embarrassed repeatedly, yet they never seem to give up. (Witness the recent series on the Book of Genesis on PBS, in which Bill Moyers intentionally cut out the fundamentalist defenders of Genesis from appearing on it, while allowing all sorts of skeptics to appear. So much for journalistic objectivity!) For example, could have Moses written the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible)? In the nineteenth century, skeptics frequently argued he couldn't have, because writing hadn't been invented yet (c. 1400 b.c.) This claim was the basis for the documentary hypothesis of liberal scholars, which said unknown editors and writers wrote them centuries later. But excavations of cities in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) have decisively smashed claims that writing developed later. The ancient city of Ebla (found in modern Syria), which first began to be unearthed in 1964, was at the height of its power in 2300 b.c. It was destroyed in 2250 b.c. Some 17,000 clay tablets with writing have been dug up there since 1974. Even this discovery alone proves writing existed around a thousand years before Moses. The world's first civilization was the Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia. Early, primitive fragments of their picture writing are dated 3100 b.c. Plainly, the nineteenth-century higher critics were wrong to deny writing hadn't been invented by the time Moses lived some 1500+ years later.

KING SARGON'S EXISTENCE, ONCE DOUBTED, NOW PROVEN

Early nineteenth-century higher critics denied that King Sargon II even existed. Mentioned in Isaiah 20:1 in connection with his attack on the philistine city of Ashdod, he ruled the ancient empire of Assyria in the eighth century b.c. But later archeologists unearthed his palace at Khorsabad (in modern Iraq), along with many inscriptions in stone about his rule. They found his own words about his campaign against Ashdod: "In a sudden rage, I did not (wait to) assemble the full might of my army (or to) prepare the camp(ing equipment), but started out towards Ashdod (only) with those of my warriors who, even in friendly areas, never leave my side. . . . I besieged (and) conquered the cities Ashdod, Gath, Asdudimmu." As the Israeli historian Moshe Pearlman writes in Digging Up the Bible: "Suddenly, sceptics who had doubted the authenticity even of the historical parts of the Old Testament began to revise their views."

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS RIGHT ABOUT HOW SENNACHERIB'S SONS ASSASSINATED HIM

The Assyrian King Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons,

according to the Old Testament (II Kings 19:36-37). Yet various historians doubted the Bible's account, citing the accounts by two ancient Babylonians who said only one son was involved. The later discovery of a fragment of a stone prism of King Esarhaddon, a son of Sennacherib, however, has confirmed the Bible's account. In part it reads: "A firm determination fell upon my brothers. They forsook the gods and turned to their deeds of violence, plotting evil. . . . To gain the kingship they slew Sennacherib their father." The historian Philip Biberfeld comments in his Universal Jewish History: "It (the Biblical account) was confirmed in all the minor details by the inscription of Esar-haddon and proved to be more accurate regarding this even than the Babylonian sources themselves. This is a fact of utmost importance for the evaluation of even contemporary sources not in accord with Biblical tradition."³⁷

EVIDENCE FOR SODOM AND GOMORRAH'S EXISTANCE

Commonly skeptics had questioned the very existence of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jehovah destroyed them for sinning sexually, mistreating visitors, and failing to help the needy (Genesis 19:4-7, 13-14, 24-25; Ezek. 16:49-50; Jude 7). While fleeing the city, Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt after looking back at Sodom illicitly (Gen. 19:26). Their names appeared on some of the tablets unearthed at the city of Ebla. The name of the city of Zoar also was found, which was the town Lot (Abraham's nephew) asked God (through the angels) to spare (Gen. 19:18-22). Although many had believed the southern end of the Dead Sea covered Sodom and Gomorrah, more recent excavations point to these two cities being underneath mounds on dry land in the same area. Having perhaps three million pottery containers and five hundred thousand people buried in some twenty thousand tombs, the site called Bab edh-Dhra is said to be Gomorrah. Seven miles to its south lies a site tentatively identified as Sodom. Ominously, excavations revealed a layer of ash and associated debris some five feet thick. Volcanic action couldn't have produced this, because no volcanoes exist here. Found under the rubble of a fallen defense tower, two human skeletons point to this city suffering a sudden end. Much like skeletons found at the Roman resort of Pompeii, abruptly buried by Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D., they had no time to flee. Dotted with salt formations, asphalt pits, and sulfur ("brimstone") deposits, this area geologically is a prime candidate for the location of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁸

HOW A BIBLICAL REFERENCE ENABLED AN ARCHEOLOGIST TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL PREDICTION

One Kings 9:15 reads: "Now this is the account of the forced labor which King Solomon levied to build the house of the Lord, his own house, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer." Dr. Yigael Yadin, an Israeli archeologist, dug up stables at Hazor like those found at Megiddo. Although Megiddo's stables had been attributed to King Solomon, they actually had been later built by the wicked Israelite king Ahab, whose wife was Jezebel.

Visiting back at the Megiddo site, Yadkin carefully wrote down a description of Solomon's gateway there. Figuring that since Solomon built the gateways at both Megiddo and Hazor, they would be similar, he told a few of his workmen exactly what they would find when unearthing the gate at Hazor. To the workmen's total astonishment, they found exactly what Yadkin said they would find: The gateways of the two cities proved to be identical. As Yadkin himself explains:

When our 'prophecies' proved correct, our prestige went up tremendously, and we were regarded as wizards. . . . When we read them [the workmen] the biblical verse about Solomon's activities in Hazor, Meggido [sic?] and Gezer [I Kings 9:15], our prestige took a dive, but that of the Bible rose sky-high!³⁹

HOW OTHER ANCIENT WRITINGS CONFIRM THE OLD TESTAMENT: SHISHAK'S INSCRIPTION

One of the best ways to test the reliability of a historical document arises when it describes accurately losses or other embarrassments. It's easy to boast about your victories to future generations--it's quite another to admit your defeats, and accurately record them for posterity. The Old Testament doesn't hesitate at all to describe graphically Israel's defeats at the hands of her enemies. But the converse was not true, for reasons Moshe Pearlman describes: "This kind of identical 'war reporting' from both sides was unusual in the Middle East of ancient times (and on occasion in modern times too). It occurred only when the countries in conflict were Israel and one of its neighbours, and only when Israel was defeated. When Israel won, no record of failure appeared in the chronicles of the enemy." Hence, when Israel humbled Egypt during the Exodus, the Egyptian priests made no records of that disaster at that time so far as it is known. But King Sargon of Assyria boasts of when (c. 722/21 b.c.) he took away 27,290 people from the city of Samaria. Two Kings 17:6 records the same disaster that overtook the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. Similarly, Pharaoh Shishak (reigned c. 945-924 b.c.) commemorated his victory over Judah and Israel on a triumphal relief written on the south wall of the Temple of Amon-Re at Karnak in Thebes. It listed nine Israelite place names, including Megiddo and Gibeon. Excavators at various sites in Israel, including Gezer, have attributed to this pharaoh's raid the evidence of devastation they have found. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the king of Judah, bought off Pharaoh Shishak by giving him all the treasures in the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem (see II Chronicles 12:1-12). Hence, the Egyptian inscription reports Shishak's victory over Israel; the Old Testament relates Israel's defeat at his hands.⁴⁰

THE MOABITE STONE AND OTHER RECORDS PROVE VARIOUS ISRAELITE KINGS LIVED

Consider the remarkable record found on the Moabite stone, discovered at Dibon (now in Jordan) in 1868 by F.A. Klein. On it King Mesha of Moab described how Israel has oppressed his nation for some forty years, starting with King Omri (876-869 b.c.) Compare this to II Kings 3:4-5: "Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and used to pay the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But it came about, when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel." Mesha on the Moabite stone then describes his unsuccessful rebellion (described in the rest of II Kings 3), during which Israel, Judah, and Edom crushed Moab's army. Later on, Mesha was successful in shaking off Israelite domination. He took vessels from the Temple of Yahweh (Jehovah), Israel's God, and dedicated them to Chemosh, Moab's god. Since this stone mentioned Omri, it was the first source discovered outside the Bible that mentioned a king of Israel or Judah. Since then the names of eleven other Israelite kings have been found in ancient texts outside the Bible. The most recent one (as of 1993), King Jehoash, was discovered in 1967 in Iraq on an Assyrian inscription. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk portrays King Jehu (or one of his emissaries) paying him tribute. Above the engraving on stone it reads: "Yaua (Jehu), son of Humri (Omri); silver, gold, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins, I received from him." (Interestingly, this same obelisk mentions King Hazael of Syria, who Elijah anointed as king--I Kings 19:15). Since higher critics once questioned the existence of some of kings of Judah and Israel, these finds have undermined their claims once again.⁴¹

THE ACCOUNT OF SENNACHERIB, KING OF ASSYRIA, OF HIS FIRST INVASION OF JUDAH

One extraordinary case of the Old Testament's account being precisely confirmed by archeological evidence concerns Sennacherib's invasions of Judah. During the first time, Sennacherib successfully grabbed the fortified cities of Judah, including Lachish. In response, Hezekiah agreed to pay tribute (II Kings 18:13): "So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold." On the hexagonal Prism of Sennacherib, unearthed in his palace at Nineveh, he boasts of his victory against Judah:

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities. . . . I drove out (of them) 200,150 people. . . . Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. . . . I still increased the tribute and the katru-presents (due) to me (as his) overlord which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually.

The amount of tribute Hezekiah handed over included "thirty talents of gold." This is an exact parallelism between the Old Testament and the pagan Assyrian

king's boasts. Sennacherib commemorated his operation and successful capture of the fortified city of Lachish during this invasion of Judah by reliefs in his throne room. On one relief, he declares: "Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a nimedu-throne and passed in review of the booty (taken) from Lachish (La-Ki-su)."⁴² Built so his army could move siege engines equipped with battering rams up it, a ramp has been unearthed in recent years there.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL VINDICATED ABOUT BELSHAZZAR, THE LAST KING OF BABYLON

At one time, skeptics claimed the book of Daniel was wrong to say the last king of Babylon was Belshazzar instead of Nabonidus. No known ancient source mentioned him besides the Bible. But thanks to archeological discoveries, piecing the actual truth together proved to be like solving a puzzle step-by-step. In 1861 on a Babylonian text, the name "Belshazzar" first appeared. Then in 1882 the Chronicle of Nabonidus appeared. It stated that Nabonidus lived in Tema while his son stayed in Babylon itself, but failed to name him. Then in 1884, Belshazzar was said to be the son of Nabonidus on one tablet. One inscription first read in 1916 had an oath sworn to both, naming both Nabonidus and Belshazzar. This obviously implied some kind of dual monarchy existed. Finally, in 1924, on yet another inscription, King Nabonidus declared: "I entrusted kingship on my son Belshazzar." The puzzle parts, when put together, show Nabonidus chose to retire (much like Charles V of Austria did in the sixteenth century, or Queen Wilhelmina of Holland in this century) while leaving actual rulership to his son. This peculiar dual kingship explained why, at his final feast after Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall for him, Belshazzar offered and later gave the Hebrew prophet the position of being "the third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan. 5:16, 29). Yale professor R.P. Dougherty placed the book of Daniel above other ancient writings, explaining: "The Scriptural account may be interpreted as excelling because it employs the name Belshazzar, because it attributes royal power to Belshazzar, and because it recognizes that a dual rulership existed in the kingdom."⁴³ This case shows that when the Bible conflicts with other ancient source(s), it's unwise to automatically assume the Bible is wrong, and the ancient pagan sources right.

LIONS IN MESOPOTAMIA AND DOMESTICATED CAMELS: THE BIBLE IS RIGHT AFTER ALL

Skeptics also have declared the Bible wrong for portraying the camel as domesticated in the time of Abraham and Isaac (c. 1820 b.c.) in Genesis 24:10. Werner Keller, in his occasionally skeptical The Bible as History (1964), maintained these "camels" were really donkeys. More recently, Moshe Dayan, the one-eyed Israeli military leader and archeologist, found evidence that camels "served as a means of transport" in patriarchal times: "An

eighteenth-century BC relief found at Byblos in Phoenicia [modern Lebanon] depicts a kneeling camel." He also added that: "Camel riders appear on cylinder seals recently discovered in Mesopotamia belonging to the patriarchal period." The higher critics also claimed no lions lived in ancient Mesopotamia.

This meant the prophet Nahum's references to them when condemning Assyria and Nineveh were wrong (see Nahum 2:11-12). It is now known lions were imported from Africa into Assyria. Kept in captivity until the king had them released, he hunted them down for sport. After killing them and bringing them back, lions would be offered in the temple as a sacrifice to the gods.⁴⁴ O, how wrong these higher critics proved to be! Yet how many believed them, thinking their conclusions came from "the assured results of modern science" rather than an anti-God bias? Hasn't it been shown above that the skeptics have been proven time and time again? Judging from their poor track record, doesn't this show people should be wary of trusting them the next time they read about someone claiming the Bible isn't historically accurate? Why be automatically skeptical of the Bible, when the skeptics themselves have been proven wrong so often? Let's be skeptical of the skeptics in the future!

OTHER CONFIRMATIONS OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Consider other cases in which archeological evidence confirmed Biblical references. After invading Canaan, Joshua built an altar to God on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30). Excavations performed on Mount Ebal during 1982-84 uncovered an ancient altar--quite possibly the one built by Joshua. The only city Joshua burned during his conquest of the promised land in the north was Hazor (cf. Josh. 11:11). Only excavations at this site have found this kind of destruction for the time of Joshua's northern campaign. Joab, the army commander for King David, and Abner, the general for King Saul's son, fought with handpicked men near the Pool of Gibeon (II Sam. 2:13-17). The actual Pool of Gibeon has been discovered, positively identified by a jar handle inscribed with "Gibeon" found in it. The prophet Amos condemned the unrighteous for having the great luxury of ivory in their houses as Israel fell into idolatry, crime, and sin. He especially included the king of Israel in context by implication (Amos 3:15; see also 6:14; I Kings 22:39). Interestingly, the king's palace is one of the few places within Israel where artifacts made of ivory have been dug up. Good King Hezekiah of Judah, according to II Kings 20:20, "made a pool and the conduit, and brought water into the city [Jerusalem]." In order to supply Jerusalem with water during a possible future siege by the Assyrians, Hezekiah bored a tunnel 1,750 feet long through solid rock. The American traveler Edward Robinson and a missionary, Eli Smith, accidentally discovered the tunnel in 1838. In 1880, a boy noticed an inscription in Hebrew on its wall, which described how the work crews dug the tunnel from each end, meeting in the middle. Hilkiah, the high priest for King Josiah of Judah, found the book of the law in the temple (II Kings 22:8). In 1984, in the home of an antique collector in Paris, a ring was found with this inscription: "(Belonging) to Hanan, son (of) Hilkiah, the priest." Clay seals (bullae) have been uncovered with such Biblical names as Baruch, the scribe

for the prophet Jeremiah, Jerahmeel, the king's son, and Gemariah, the son of Shaphan the scribe (Jer. 32:12, 36:12, 26). Nebuchadnezzar's three assaults against Jerusalem (605 b.c., 598-597 b.c., and 589-586 b.c.) all have evidence from outside the Bible to confirm their occurrence. Especially striking is the tablet where in his seventh year "the Babylonian king" took "the city of Judah," installed a king of his choice [i.e., Zedekiah for Jehoiachin], and received heavy tribute (II Kings 24:10-18). On the cylinder that bears his name, King Cyrus of Persia had his own words discovered in Babylon in 1887. Corresponding to Isaiah 45:13 for the Jews, he proclaims the policy of allowing those captives dragged into exile by Babylon to return home and to let them rebuild their sanctuaries. Time and again, the Bible's references do check out--so why are so many today so skeptical about it?⁴⁵

THE CASE HISTORY OF JERICHO'S DATING: HOW ARCHEOLOGY ISN'T ALWAYS RELIABLE

The above doesn't prove that every bit of archeological evidence as presently interpreted by archeologists is in perfect conformity with the Bible. Some controversies remain, mainly over dating. Archeological evidence can be interpreted in more than one way in good faith, since it is inevitably fragmentary and hence limited. As Yohanan Aharoni explained: "When it comes to historical or historio-geographical interpretation, the archaeologist steps out of the realm of the exact sciences, and he must rely upon value judgements and hypotheses to arrive at a comprehensive historical picture." Furthermore, he admits that archeologists aren't infallible when assigning dates, although today they are better than they used to be. For a case history of these kinds of problems, consider the date for the fall of Jericho, the first city Joshua took when Israel invaded the Promised Land. A straightforward interpretation of I Kings 6:1, which says Solomon began to build the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem 480 years after Israel left Egypt, points to the Exodus occurring about the year 1445 b.c. Since Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness in punishment for their sins, they must have taken Jericho about the year 1405 b.c. Before World War II, professor John Garstang found the city of Jericho had been wiped out and rebuilt numerous times. For one of these times, the walls fell as if an earthquake destroyed them, and fire totally burned up the city. He even found that the walls fell outwards, as Joshua 6:20 implies, which is very unusual for ancient cities, whose walls normally fell inwards, towards their buildings. Garstang believed this event happened around 1400 b.c.--just about the time Joshua invaded Palestine. But later, following her own excavations, the archeologist Kathleen Kenyon maintained Jericho was destroyed about 1325 b.c., after a much earlier destruction in the sixteenth century. She believed no inhabited city occupied the site in the fifteenth century. Was the Bible wrong? More recently, John J. Brimson re-examined the evidence. He maintains the destruction Kenyon saw as happening in the sixteenth century could well have occurred in the middle of the fifteenth. Furthermore, Garstang's earlier investigation found only one piece of Mycenean (early Greek and Cretan) pottery out of over 150,000 shards at the

City IV level of Jericho. Since Mycenean pottery was exported into Palestine soon after 1400 b.c., this level of Jericho had to have been destroyed considerably earlier than approximate 1325 b.c. date Kenyon deduced. Hence, since the evidence concerning the date of Jericho's fall can easily be interpreted to fit the Bible's dating of it, there's no compelling reason to say it is wrong. (Notice the dispute concerns dating, not whether Jericho existed or the walls fell). This case demonstrates an important principle about the relationship of archeological evidence and the Bible: If there are any disagreements, reexamination and reinterpretation of existing evidence or the discovery of new evidence may resolve them. This is hardly a procedure of blind faith, since archeology in the past has so often has vindicated the Bible while abasing its critics (who still never seem to give up!)⁴⁶

HOW TO CHECK THE NEW TESTAMENT'S BACKGROUND

Although many of the specific events of the New Testament can't be checked out in other historical documents, much of its general background can be, such as place names, customs, governmental procedures, religious rituals, the names of prominent persons, etc. Hence, the Roman government did issue coins with Caesar's head on it called denarii (Matt. 22:17-21), Tiberius was an emperor of Rome (Luke 3:1), the Sanhedrin was the supreme ruling body of the Jews in Judea (Matt. 26:59), footwashing was a lowly task normally done by servants (John 13:12-14), crucifixion was a punishment routinely meted out by the Roman government against non-citizens (Mark 15:24), etc. Archeologists have discovered the pool of Bethesda with five porticoes (John 5:2-4) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:7, 11). The Nazareth stone, discovered in 1878, proves place of Christ's childhood did exist. For many centuries no record of the spot where Jesus was tried before being crucified, "the Pavement," had been discovered. But Albright found that it was the court of the Tower of Antonia. It had been the Roman military headquarters in Jerusalem, but got buried when the Emperor Hadrian (76-138, ruled 117-138 A.D.) rebuilt the city.⁴⁷ So although most of the specific events recorded in the Gospels can't be directly checked in pagan or Jewish historical works, the general cultural background certainly can be.

THE ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR PONTIUS PILATE VERSUS THE ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

More specifically, consider the case of Pontius Pilate as bearing on the New Testament's trustworthiness. Some have doubted whether Pontius Pilate even lived, the Roman Empire's Procurator of Judea who had Jesus of Nazareth crucified in 31 A.D. (Matthew 27; John 18-19). But then in 1961 an archeological expedition from Italy overturned a stone used as a stairway for a Roman theater in ancient Caesarea (in modern Israel). The Latin inscription on it said (here put in English): "To the people of Caesarea Tiberium Pontius Pilate Prefect of Judea." As Michael J. Howard remarks: "It was a fatal blow to the doubts about Pilate's existence. . . . For the first time there was

contemporary epigraphic [writing in stone] evidence of the life of the man who ordered the crucifixion of Christ.⁴⁸ This case illustrates a fallacious argument that disbelievers in the Bible use again and again. They argue from silence, and say that because the Bible records something mentioned nowhere else, it can't be true (or certainly true). Archeological discoveries have repeatedly refuted their claims after being made, as shown above in the section dealing with the Old Testament. The New and Old Testaments have shown themselves trustworthy so often in what can be checked, it's proper to infer or extrapolate that the rest of what can't be checked is also reliable. This is not a procedure of blind faith.

LUKE'S RELIABILITY AS A HISTORIAN PERSUADES AN ATHEIST TO BECOME A BELIEVER

What archeological evidence is there for the New Testament's reliability generally, and Luke's in particular? The English archeologist Sir William Ramsay (professor of humanity at Aberdeen University in Scotland, 1886-1911) had been totally skeptical about the accuracy of the New Testament, especially the writings of Luke. Indeed, he was an atheist, raised by parents who were atheists. After going to what is now Turkey, and doing a topographical study, he totally changed his mind. This man, who had studied archeology in order to refute the Bible, instead discovered hundreds of historical facts that confirmed it. Later, he wrote that Luke "should be placed along with the very greatest of historians." He had believed, as per nineteenth-century German higher criticism, that Acts was written in the second century. But he found it must have been written earlier, because it reflected conditions typical of the second half of the first century. He explained why he changed his mind thus:

I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tubingen [higher critic] theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative [of Luke in Acts] showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES SHOWING LUKE WAS RIGHT AFTER ALL

Let's examine some cases where Luke was called wrong, but later vindicated. For example, Luke was said to imply incorrectly that the cities of Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia but Iconium wasn't (Luke 14:6), according to what the Roman politician and orator Cicero (106-43 b.c.) and others had written anciently. But in 1910, Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was in Phrygia, not Lycaonia--a discovery since corroborated by further evidence. When Luke said Lysanias was the Tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3:1), this was said to be erroneous, since the only Lysanias known to ancient historians had died in 36 b.c. But later an inscription, dated between A.D. 14 and 29, was discovered near Damascus, Syria that said "Freedman of Lysanias the Tetrarch." The textual critic F.J.A. Fort maintained Luke was wrong to use the Greek word meris to mean "district" when referring to Philippi as part of Macedonia. Later archeological discoveries have found that Luke was right--this very word meris was employed to describe this district's divisions. Luke called Publius of Malta the "first man of the island" (Acts 28:7); inscriptions have been found that refer to him as "first man." Luke wrote of a riot in Ephesus that took place in its theater. Having room for 25,000 people, this theater has been dug up. Paul's preaching here provoked a riot because silversmiths feared their trade in objects related to the Temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world) would collapse if he was believed. Correspondingly, one unearthed inscription said the silver statues of Artemis were to be placed in the "theater during a full session of the Ecclesia [assembly]." Luke once described Paul nearly being killed by a riot provoked by the rumor he had brought a gentile into the Temple (Acts 21:27-31). Helping confirm this account, archeologists have found inscriptions that read in Latin and Greek: "No foreigner may enter within the barrier which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will be personally responsible for his ensuing death."⁴⁹ Evidence favoring Luke's reliability as a historian, and thus the New Testament's, could be easily extended.

THE DATE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH AND THE CENSUS BY QUIRINIUS

Was Luke wrong to say Jesus was born during a census taken by Quirinius during the rule of King Herod the Great? What caused Jesus to be born in Bethlehem instead of (say) Nazareth was the Roman Emperor Augustus's order for everyone to register for a census in their ancestral home town (see Luke 1:5, 26-35, 2:1-7). Since Herod died in 4 b.c., but the first census conducted by the Roman official Quirinius as recorded by others occurred in A.D. 6-7, skeptics have said Luke was wrong. It must be realized, however, that this is really an argument from silence. Since the Jewish historian Josephus (etc.) didn't mention an earlier census under Quirinius, it claims no census happened, therefore, Luke must be wrong. As shown above, archeological discoveries have repeatedly exploded similar skeptical contentions in the past. Consider the present-day status of arguments such as, "Moses couldn't have written the Pentateuch since writing hadn't been yet invented in his day," or "Belshazzar couldn't have been the last king of Babylon

because Herodotus mentions only Nabonidus." Waiting in faith could well solve this problem, especially since Luke has been proven right and his critics wrong on various points in the past. The case of Antipas mentioned above comes to mind, since the record of an earlier man named "Antipas" was judged to prove Luke wrong, until a later discovery proved another man named "Antipas" did live in the early first century A.D.

EVIDENCE FOR LUKE BEING RIGHT ABOUT THE CENSUS' DATE

Positive but inconclusive evidence that Luke was right has been found. Two inscriptions have been uncovered that potentially indicate that Quirinius did have an earlier governorship in Syria. The Lapis Venetus describes a census ordered by Quirinius for the Syrian city of Apamea which some evidence says was made sometime between 10-6 b.c., although a number of others maintain it refers to the 6 A.D. census. Another inscription, called the Lapis Tiburtinus mentions someone who had earlier been the proconsul of Cyrene (in modern Libya), who later subdued the Homonadensians, and then "again" received the legateship of Syria and Phoenicia (in modern Lebanon). Since Quirinius is known to have suppressed the Homonadensian tribes for Rome, to have fought in the Gaetulian war in North Africa, and was the governor of Syria (or "the one leading" it), it's sensible to say this inscription refers to him. But due to its ill-preserved condition, his name is missing. Admittedly, the word "again" could mean he merely received a legateship a second time, not necessarily in the same locale. Interestingly, scholar E.J. Vardaman maintains he has "micrographic" evidence that conclusively proves this inscription refers to Quirinius which had yet to be published and checked over. Note Luke 2:2's potential implications when mentioning this census: "This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." Using the word "first" may indicate a second was done under his command. (Compare Acts 5:37, when Luke mentions the census, occurring in 6 A.D., in connection with Judas of Galilee's revolt). Furthermore, Quirinius may have been given some kind of "extraordinary command" or official position in Syria while battling the Homonadensians in Cilicia and elsewhere. But then he would have been kept under the authority of Saturninus, the proconsul of Syria from 9 b.c. to 6 b.c., or Varus, the governor from 7 or 6 b.c. to 4 b.c. Being neither experienced nor especially competent, Varus later earned infamy in Roman history by having three legions destroyed under his command in Germany's Teutoburger forest (9 A.D.) In order to assist Varus, Augustus Caesar (ruled 27 b.c. to 14 A.D.) may have given Quirinius, who had much experience in the region as a general, an ad hoc (temporary) commission to conduct the census over the Jews. Archer maintains that the Greek of Luke 2:2 doesn't actually say Quirinius was the governor, but that he "was leading--in charge of--Syria." So while he was battling the Homonadensian tribes in the mountains of Pisidia between 12 b.c. and 2 b.c., Quirinius may have been put in charge of the earlier census (c. 4 b.c.) under the man who officially was the legate or governor.

Since previous censuses had incited Jewish unrest, Herod may have been dragging his feet about it, causing Augustus to intervene. For sensitive position, an experienced Mideast hand like Quirinius would be of value. But one scholar took a stronger stand on the inscriptions found at Rome and Antioch on this issue: "The scholarly researches of Zumpt (Commentat. epitgraph., II, 86-104: De Syria romana provincia, 97-98) and of Mommesen (Res gestae divi Augusti) place beyond doubt that Quirinius was twice governor of Syria." Based on inscriptional evidence others discount, Ramsay believed Quirinius was a co-governor of Syria in 8-6 b.c.⁵⁰

WHY IT'S RATIONAL TO INFER LUKE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE TIMING OF THIS CENSUS

The dictum of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 b.c.) was that the benefit of the doubt should give given to the author, and not arrogated to the critic himself. Skeptics routinely violate this principle when analyzing the Bible. What justifies Aristotle's principle? Simply put, the modern critic's life is far removed in time from the events the document describes compared to its author's life. The ancient author is, a priori, a better candidate for knowing what really happened than his modern critic, separated by vast gaps in time, space, and/or culture from him.⁵¹ Because Luke has shown himself reliable in what can be checked, it is the purest poppycock to stamp Luke "WRONG!" just because Josephus (in particular) doesn't mention an earlier census conducted by Quirinius. Therefore, what Luke wrote that can't be fully checked at the present time should be assumed--rather, inferred--to be correct.

THIS NEW TESTAMENT CENSUS WAS NOT ABSURD

Skeptics have heaped scorn on the census recorded in Luke 2:1, saying it's absurd that Augustus ordered an census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. It's argued that the Romans would not have made millions of people to travel immediately back to their home towns or villages to register to pay a tax. But this analysis is flatly wrong historically. Luke's statement doesn't mean all the provinces right then were enrolled, as Hoehner describes, but that Augustus was

the first one in history to order a census or tax assessment of the whole provincial empire. This is further substantiated by the fact that Luke uses the present tense indicated that Augustus ordered censuses to be taken regularly rather than only one time.

The Romans routinely conducted censuses similar to what Luke described. As Davis remarks: "Every five years the Romans enumerated citizens and their property to determine their liabilities. This practice was extended to include the entire Roman Empire in 5 B.C." The enumeration wasn't done to extract from them then a specified small amount in tax, but to assess their future ability

to pay taxes in the years to come before the next census, and also for drafting men into the Roman legions. Archeological discoveries have found the Romans enrolled taxpayers and every fourteen years held censuses. Augustus began this practice, with the first taking place in either 23-22 b.c. or 9-8 b.c. An Egyptian document made of papyrus dated to 104 A.D. indicates that the Roman census in Egypt required Egyptians to return to their home city that year. As Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary relates: "This [the census of Luke 2:1-3] was probably a census required of all nations under the rule of Rome. All citizens were required to return to their places of birth for an official registration of their property for tax purposes."⁵²

EARLY PAGAN REFERENCES TO JESUS OUTSIDE THE NEW TESTAMENT

What non-Christian sources refer to Jesus soon after his death? The Roman historian Tacitus's (c. 56-120 A.D.) statement about Jesus leads among the external evidence outside the New Testament for His life. Showing this couldn't be a pro-Christian monk's inserted interpolation, Tacitus wrote skeptically of Jesus and Christianity:

Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero [(r. 54-68 A.D.), who was blamed for the great fire that broke out in Rome under his rule--EVS] substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the found of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.⁵³

Other early incidental mentions of Jesus and/or the Christians by non-Christian writers have survived. The Greek writer and satirist, Lucian of Samosata (c. 120-190 A.D.) once wrote of Jesus as:

the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world. . . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.

The Roman historian and biographer Suetonius (c. 69-after 122 A.D.) remarked: "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius, in 50 A.D.--cf. Acts 18:2, where Luke mentions this event independently] expelled them from Rome." Obviously inaccurate, this statement appears to place Christ personally in Rome, instead

of saying teaching about Christ had agitated the Jews into rioting. Still, it does mention Christ's existence. Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (112 A.D.), wrote to the Emperor Trajan about how to treat the Christians. He had been putting many to death. He asked whether if all of them should be or just certain ones. He says of them:

They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.

Some other ancient writers, such as Thallus, Phlegon, and Mara Bar-Serapion also wrote of Christ, but their references are preserved only as fragments in the writings of Christians,⁵⁴ making their testimony more problematic as independent evidence.

JOSEPHUS AS INDEPENDENT TESTIMONY FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT AND JESUS' LIFE

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100 A.D.) mentioned Jesus twice. Providing independent support for the New Testament's account, Josephus also described John the Baptist, his ministry, and his execution by Herod.⁵⁵ Once he briefly alludes to Jesus in a noncommittal or even hostile manner. This supports its authenticity since a committed Christian is an unlikely candidate to write such an interpolation about his Savior. Ananus, the high priest, "convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned."⁵⁶ Being a Jew, Josephus correspondingly and significantly is aware that "Christ" was a title, not a surname originally. Christians increasingly treated it as the latter as a standard practice. More problematic is this famous passage:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him,

has still to this day not disappeared.

WHY JOSEPHUS' TESTIMONY HAS SOME VALIDITY

Clearly, Josephus could not have written all of the longer passage, or else he would have been a Christian, since he calls Jesus the Messiah and believes in His resurrection. On the other hand, it shouldn't be seen as an interpolation created whole cloth, since favorable evidence exists for its (partial) authenticity as well. Since all the handwritten manuscript copies of Josephus contain it, there is good textual evidence for it. Eusebius (c. 260-339 A.D.), the Catholic Church historian, cited it as well. As for internal evidence, consider that Josephus called Jesus a "wise man." A committed Christian would not say something so limited, since Jesus is his God and Savior, but it is like what Josephus said of Solomon and Daniel. Calling His miracles "surprising feats" or "astonishing deeds" isn't how a Christian would usually describe Jesus' miracles, but Josephus uses the same language to describe Elisha's miracles. Labeling Christians a "tribe" is never done in early Christian literature, but it fits Josephus's tendency to use this term for the Jews and other national and communal groups. This passage blames Pontius Pilate heavily for the crucifixion, which certainly swam against the prevailing anti-Semitic Christian tides of the second and third centuries. Since Catholic Church father Origen (c. 185-254? A.D.) said that Josephus denied Jesus as the Messiah, he couldn't have known it in this form. Hence, this passage curiously combines Josephus's literary style with some unknown Christian scribe's adulteration of it. Instead of tossing it out completely, conjecturally reconstructing an original text is more justifiable. Consider F.F. Bruce's stab at this, which assumes Josephus displayed a hostile tone towards Christianity:

Now there arose about this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him, is not extinct even today.⁵⁷

Even with the self-evident Christian changes to this passage removed, it still attests that Jesus did miracles, that some called Him the Messiah, that Pontius Pilate executed Him, and that His teachings began a religious movement. So more can be known about Jesus outside the New Testament than just His bare existence and crucifixion. Some independent testimony for His life appears in non-Christian sources within a century and a half of his death.

THE FIRST PROBLEM WITH THE ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

Higher critics repeatedly mistakenly reason that if only the New Testament refers to some event, and no other pagan or Jewish source does, then whatever it mentions is automatically suspect. For example, one higher critic reasoned that since the slaughter of the babes by Herod at Bethlehem or Pilate's custom of pardoning criminals at Passover weren't mentioned elsewhere, therefore the New Testament was wrong. But this argues from silence, which is a logical fallacy. Furthermore, as Louis Gottschalk notes, a document should be considered reliable until, under the burden of proof, its untrustworthiness is displayed. To assume routinely everyone lies is ultimately self-refuting, as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) observed. When it's presumed everyone lies routinely, then lying becomes needless, for lying only has value when it's assumed everyone normally does tell the truth. Today's society is saturated with a hyper-skeptical attitude about anything spiritual or supernatural which, if it was consistently applied to other facets of life, would make organized society impossible.⁵⁸ Similarly, the Old Testament mentions many events described nowhere else--does that make it historically false or invalid? No reference to the Exodus has been found among ancient Egyptian records at the time Israel left Egypt (c. 1445 b.c.) Does that mean it never happened? No--this means the Egyptian priests, who wrote with hieroglyphics and kept the basic records, wouldn't want to record any events that humbled them and their gods. They just conveniently overlooked this spectacular event. Much like how the Russian communist dictator Joseph Stalin removed Trotsky or some other Old Bolshevik's picture from one or more published photographs of Russian revolutionary leaders, inconvenient truths get omitted. The idea of writing unbiased history only arose among the Greeks (arguably with Thucydides's history of the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 b.c.). Since then, as an ideal and as actual practice, it has always had an uphill battle ever since in the world. Similarly, would Josephus or some pagan historian record events that prove their worldview wrong? Hardly!

THE LOGICAL PROBLEM WITH THE ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

To say a historical document is invalid because its contents aren't replicated elsewhere is an argument from a lack of evidence. A sound argument needs to have correct premises with a valid form (organization), which requires that it contains some positive evidence for its assertion. An argument from silence builds upon non-existent (an absence of) evidence. True, it sometimes has force in some contexts, such as for dating a document concerning BIG events hard to overlook. For example, if a modern European history textbook had its copyright page missing, but was otherwise complete, and it covers the Great Depression, but nothing about WWII or anything afterwards, it's safe to conclude it was published in the 1930s. Still, it's fundamentally invalid; nobody should place his faith in such arguments as a basis for his salvation! But as discussed above, since the Gospels (and Acts) have proven themselves reliable in what can be checked by archeological data and/or ancient non-Christian sources, what can't be checked should be assumed to be true, which is a process of inference, and not blind faith.

AN ANCIENT JEWISH SLANDER: “JESUS BEN PANTHERA”

Consider the ancient Jewish slander that Jesus was born illegitimately (cf. John 8:41). It claims He had a Roman soldier for a father named Pandera or Panthera. Celsus, an ancient pagan critic of Christianity who wrote a harsh polemic against it also defamed Jesus this way. Celsus willingly beat his opposition with any stick handy, you see! Historian Robin Lane Fox describes how Celsus used a Jew to reel off the claim that Jesus had been born of an adulterous relationship between this Roman soldier and Mary. Later, He was said to practice sorcery and magical arts [which admits obliquely to His ability to perform miracles by the power of God] while begging for a living with His worthless disciples. "Much of this abuse matches the allusions to Jesus which occur in later, written versions of the Jews' 'anti-Gospels.' In the 170s Celsus the Platonist had clearly picked up the Jews' own slanders." How did the name "Panthera" become associated with Jesus? One suggestion says that it came from the Greek word "pentheros," meaning "son-in-law." An even more plausible reconstruction maintains it was a corruption of the Greek word for virgin, "parthenos." This word appears in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament for Isaiah 7:14, which always has been a battleground messianic text between Christians and Jews. As Klausner states: "The Jews constantly heard that the Christians (the majority of whom spoke Greek from the earliest times) called Jesus by the name 'Son of the Virgin,' . . . and so, in mockery, they called him Ben ha-Pantera, i.e., 'son of the leopard.'" But Jesus could have gained the epithet another way. As verified by first-century inscriptions, this name was hardly rare. After saying it was as common as the names Fox or Wolf today, Rabbi and Professor Morris Goldstein commented:

It is noteworthy that [Catholic Church father] Orig[e]n himself is credited with the tradition that Panther was the appellation of James (Jacob), the father of Joseph, the father of Jesus. . . . So, too, Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, Epiphanius the Monk, and the author of Andronicus of Constantinople's Dialogue Against the Jews, name Panther as an ancestor of Jesus.

Since one statement in the Babylonian Talmud (Yebamoth 62b) authorizes someone to be called by his grandfather's name, this may explain how Jesus wound up being labeled "Panthera," which non-Messianic Jews perversely twisted into a lurid slander against His virgin birth.⁵⁹ It's very dubious to take an ancient pagan polemic's claims at face value. Those using sources uncritically are marked as poor would-be historians.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST: DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF?

Let's now apply the third of Sanders's tests for evaluating historical documents, the internal evidence test, to the Bible. Does the Bible have contradictions? Anyone claiming this should be challenged to identify them. They might not be able to name even one, because they know so little about the Bible. They're just assuming what some atheist, agnostic, or liberal told them about it is true, without checking it out for themselves. Below, while some of the more commonly trotted out "contradictions" are dealt with, you may wish still to do more research. Those especially interested in claims of contradictions or historical inaccuracies in the Bible should turn to Gleason Archer's Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, John W. Haley's Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, which is an older work, or any solid conservative commentary that accepts the Bible as the inspired word of God. It's simply absurd to read only what various higher critics say against the Bible, thinking that ends the story. Standard replies on claimed contradictions are readily available from the skeptics' opponents. It's hardly a great sign of profundity to ask, "Where did Cain get his wife?", thinking this question is a stumper. The Bible makes clear that Adam and Eve had both sons and daughters (Gen. 5:4). Obviously, Cain would have married one of his sisters. (This was necessary since God chose to start with just two ancestors for the human race, so we could all say we're ultimately all part of one family (cf. Acts 17:26)). So--let's begin!

DOES AN ADDITION OR SUBTRACTION OF DETAIL CREATE A "CONTRADICTION"?

When charging the Bible contradicts itself, higher critics seem to assume that an addition or omission of detail creates a contradiction. For example, one higher critic said that Luke's account of the resurrection

appearances that had them "only" occurring in and near Jerusalem contradicts John's account of them occurring in Galilee as well as Jerusalem. Is this really a rational line of argument? How does Luke contradict John when the former simply omits describing some of Jesus' resurrection appearances? Where does Luke say he made an exhaustive and complete list by language like, "I have recorded every appearance of the resurrected Christ, and they were . . ."? Only then would a contradiction arise if John recorded appearances not found in Luke. Similarly, it's been said that the Gospel of John mentioned nothing about angels or an earthquake concerning the resurrection, but Matthew's did. Matthew said an earthquake happened earlier during the night, which caused the guards to become like dead men, but John doesn't. How does this additional information found in one Gospel "contradict" the other? Furthermore, John's account actually does refer to the two angels (John 20:12-13): "She beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying," one of whom asks, "'Woman, why are you weeping?'" So when someone claims the Bible has a contradiction, it pays to check out the actual text and its immediate context, to make sure some omission of detail really did happen. Similarly, the Gospel writers mention one or more women were at Christ's tomb early in the morning. Although John initially only mentions Mary Magdalene, while the other gospels say other women visited the tomb, this is not ultimately a discrepancy. **IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT ANY ONE GOSPEL (OR OTHER SINGLE) ACCOUNT GIVES ALL OF THE DETAILS ON ANY ONE EVENT.**

IT'S NECESSARY TO COLLECT ALL THE DATA FIRST TO DRAW ANY CONCLUSIONS

In a modern court of law, a contradiction wouldn't be proven because one witness failed to see, state, or remember all the details of a crime when another witness remembers a somewhat different list of details about that event, so long as the differences concern additions and omissions of detail. A description that a bank robber wore a hat doesn't contradict a report about him wearing an overcoat while saying nothing about a hat. A contradiction would arise only if (in this example) the second witness also explicitly said that the criminal wore no hat. This example shows why one higher critic was wrong to imply Luke and John contradicted each another about the length of Christ's ministry. To draw general conclusions like this, it's necessary to put all the data together first from all four Gospels. This general approach makes it superfluous to analyze every conceivable supposed contradiction in the resurrection accounts, or any other case the Bible has two parallel accounts about some event or person. Armed with this principle, it becomes easy to expose how weak many higher critic arguments are. Furthermore, the seeming discrepancies actually can be seen as proof for Christianity in one regard: They show that the Gospel writers, or the authors of I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles, didn't sit down together and concoct stories about Jesus or some Israelite king. The dissimilarities point to different sources for the account found in Gospels (etc.), proving one person couldn't have written them all,

besides what any writing style variations may indicate.⁶⁰

SOME ALLEGED "CONTRADICTIONS" IN THE BIBLE EXAMINED

For example, was Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, not Berechiah, as Christ said in Matt. 23:35? Here the problem involves identifying correctly the right "Zechariah." Since Zechariah of Jehoiada died 800 b.c., saying he was the last of the Old Testament's martyrs (as Christ's words imply, since Abel clearly was the first) is unlikely. Since about 30 separate individuals in the Old Testament have this name, that two of them suffered a similar fate shouldn't be surprising. Christ is presumably referring to the minor prophet Zechariah (see Zech. 1:1), who prophesied from about 520-475 b.c. Living much closer to the time the Old Testament's canon was completed than Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, this man is certainly a better candidate for the last pre-Christian martyr. Since the Old Testament reveals very little about Zechariah the son of Berechiah's life, nothing exists to deny that he died exactly as Christ said here. As Archer remarks: "If we take Matthew 23:35 just as it stands, it makes perfectly sense in its context; and it offers no contradiction to any known and established facts of history."⁶¹

STEPHEN'S SPEECH ABOUT OLD TESTAMENT EVENTS: WAS THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR WRONG?

Stephen's speech summarized a good amount of the Old Testament's history before the Jews he infuriated martyred him. Stephen said that Abraham left Haran after his father died (Acts 7:4), implying this death immediately preceded his departure. Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), and his father Terah was 70 when Abraham was born (Gen. 11:26). If Terah was 205 years old before he died (Gen. 11:32), this means he lived 60 years after Abraham left Haran. As good as this argument looks, it assumes something problematic. On genealogical lists, is the first name listed always the first one born? Note carefully Gen. 11:26: "And Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." Terah's sons surely were not triplets all born on the same day in the same year, but gaps occurred between them. Since Abram, later Abraham, was by far the most prominent in biblical history, it makes sense his name would be listed first, before that of one or two older brothers. Similarly, when Adam had Seth, he was not his oldest son. Cain and Abel were older, yet in Gen. 5:3-4 they were lumped together as part of his "other sons and daughters." Hence, Terah may have been 130 when he had Abraham, dying when Abraham was 75 and he was 205. (People lived longer at that time, soon after the flood, so these ages shouldn't be dismissed as mistaken).

STEPHEN ON JACOB'S FAMILY MOVING INTO EGYPT

Later Stephen states 75 entered Egypt under Jacob, but the Old Testament in the Hebrew text says 70 (see Acts 7:14; Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5;

Deut. 10:22). Was Stephen wrong? Archer notes that Stephen follows the enumeration found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which reads 75 in Gen. 46:27 and Ex. 1:5. One of the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts (4AExod-a, in Hebrew) also reads 75. Two approaches exist for solving this discrepancy. One maintains both totals are right--by adding the sons of Manasseh and Ephraim born to them in Egypt before Jacob died, the 75 figure is easily reached (note I Chron. 7:14-15, 20-23). After all, since Joseph and his two sons already lived in Egypt, they had no need to migrate there. The other solution builds upon the somewhat differing wording found in Acts 7:14 compared to Gen. 46:26. The latter text excludes the wives of Jacob's children, but not the former. It also implicitly excludes those not having to migrate to be in Egypt (i.e., Joseph and his sons). Read Acts 7:14 carefully: "And Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all." (Since "in all" is in italics in the NASB, it wasn't in the original text). "Relatives" can include wives here, who were specifically excluded in the Gen. 46:26 count. Haley explains his reasoning thus: "If to the sixty-six we add the nine wives of Jacob's sons (Judah's and Simeon's wives were dead; Joseph could not be said to call himself, his own wife, or his two sons into Egypt; and Jacob is specified separately by Stephen), we have seventy-five persons, as in Acts."⁶² Hence, since these two numbers could have been reached by different means, the Septuagint shouldn't be automatically ruled wrong textually. (The Hebrew Masoretic text should be preferred as better than the Septuagint's, but not always).

HOW MANY DIED IN THE PLAGUE GOD SENT AGAINST ISRAEL?

Does I Cor. 10:8 contradict Num. 25:9? Numbers says 24,000 Israelites died in a plague, while in I Corinthians Paul says 23,000 died after acting immorally. A key issue here is whether I Cor. 10:8 refers to when Israel played the harlot with the daughters of Moab, instead of when Israel worshipped the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. Since the preceding verse, I Cor. 10:7, cites Ex. 32:6, Paul may have meant a different incident than the one Num. 25:9 describes. True, the golden calf incident mentions specifically only 3,000 as being slain by the Levites (Ex. 32:28). But God also sent a plague to punish Israel that day for its sins (v. 35): "Then the Lord smote ['plagued'--NKJV] the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made." Although Exodus records no specific figure on how many this plague killed, Paul may have gotten the 23,000 figure by direct revelation from God centuries after the golden calf incident. Another possibility remains--transmissional error. About 18 or 20 times the numbers I and II Chronicles contain fail to line up with parallel figures in I and II Kings and/or I and II Samuel. For example, II Chron. 9:25 says Solomon built 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots, while I Kings 4:26 lists 40,000. Since the number of horsemen is the same in both verses (12,000), this must be a scribal error. Now, do such discrepancies prove faith in the Old Testament is foolish?

Of course not. Before the Jewish scribes called the Soperim had the numbers copied in words instead of numerals, a scribe easily could have mistaken the number of dots standing for thousands over the letters that stood for each number in an ageing, increasingly brittle manuscript. After considering the hundreds of cases the numbers do line up between the Old Testament's parallel sources, the few cases they don't hardly justify doubt.⁶³ The difference between Paul's 23,000 figure and Numbers 25's 24,000 figure may lie in some scribal error committed centuries before Paul's birth--assuming that Paul was referring to the incident in Num. 25, which remains unproven.

ARE THE GENEALOGIES OF CHRIST IN LUKE AND MATTHEW CONTRADICTORY OR FALSE?

Are the family trees of Christ listed in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 contradictory? The basic solution maintains Matthew traces Jesus' family tree through Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, while Luke apparently describes Mary's ancestral line. Since Luke 3:23 says Jesus was "supposedly the son of Joseph" (i.e., not his real father), it points to the mother. Eli (or Heli) is actually then Joseph's father-in-law. But befitting a Gospel intended for evangelizing the Jews in particular, Matthew recorded Jesus' line back to King David. By contrast, Luke, being a gentile, wrote a "universal history" about Jesus' acts, sayings, and life. He traced Jesus' line back to Adam, the first man, the progenitor of all men and women, whether Jew or gentile. The wording of Matt. 1:16 obliquely points to the virgin conception and birth, since its wording differs from the rest of the chapter's "begats": "and to Jacob was born Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." It inserts Mary in between the mentions of Joseph and Jesus, calling Joseph her husband, but not saying he begat Jesus. It has been claimed that the Jews, being such a patriarchal people, would trace only the father's line and not the mother's in genealogies. First, this analysis ignores the virgin birth's unique circumstances. By necessity, as no human father was actually involved, a family tree had to be put together differently. Second, in the cases of Ruth, Sarah, and Jacob's wives, the Old Testament did pay attention to the woman's role in a general genealogical context (see Ruth 4:13-22; Gen. 11:28-31; 35:22-26). When Zelophehad had no sons, but only daughters, all their names were recorded as well so they could still gain inheritances from him (Num. 26:33; 27:1-9). Correspondingly, Wheeler has an interesting speculation about how the royal line could be traced through a woman: "Apparently Mary was the only child of her father, and thus his rights of inheritance passed on to her--provided she married within her tribe (Numbers 36:1-9). Through Mary, that inheritance passed to Jesus."⁶⁴ The genealogy listed in I Chron. 2:16 says the mother of Joab (King David's top general) is Zeruiah, who was the sister of David. Joab's father is simply omitted. Women are mentioned in genealogical lists elsewhere (see I Chron. 2:35, 48; 3:1-3). John 6:42 and John 1:45 don't prove Joseph was Jesus' physical father because both times (especially the first) the New

Testament merely reported the erroneous suppositions of the speakers. Similarly, it reports the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan in Matt. 9:34: "But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of demons.'" When the New Testament correctly reports a falsehood Jesus' enemies spoke, no one should accept it as actually being true!

THE "DISCREPANCIES" AS EVIDENCE FOR MULTIPLE WITNESSES WRITING THE BIBLE

Above, some of the Bible's alleged "contradictions" have been dealt with. In this connection, consider that the Bible was written over a period of at least 1500 years by about 40 different authors, most of whom never met each other. The sensible question then becomes, "Why aren't there more internal problems in the Bible?" Furthermore, the differences between the parallel accounts help show the Bible had independent witnesses for the same events. These differences show no one person sat down to concoct them. Future archeological or historical evidence may help others to be resolved. For example, Jesus was said to be going out of Jericho by Matthew and Mark when he met a blind beggar He healed, while Luke said He was coming near it. (See Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43) Who is right? True, it's possible to use Archer's solution that an unnoted break occurs in Luke 18:35-43: The beggar asked for Jesus' attention both before and after going into Jericho, but only got His attention when He was leaving. But archeological evidence presents us with another possible solution. An expedition led by Ernest Sellin of the German Oriental Society discovered in 1907-1909 that Jericho was a double city. The new Roman one was built about a mile from the older Jewish one. Hence, possibly while Jesus was leaving one of these twin cities and was approaching the other, He healed the blind beggar's eyes. At first glance, the higher critics' claim that the Bible contradictorily describes this incident might look strong. But as archeology reveals essential background knowledge had been known to the authors of the accounts, but not to us today, the higher critics' case starts to fall apart.

HOW KNOWING THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE CAN RESOLVE "CONTRADICTIONS"

Sometimes knowing subtleties of the original language can resolve apparent contradictions or other problems. For example, Paul said, when describing his conversion experience to a crowd of Jews: "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me" (Acts 22:9, KJV). But when God struck down Paul on the road to Damascus, the experience was described thus: "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7, KJV). So then--did the men accompanying Paul actually hear a voice or

not? In fact, the King James Version's translation of Acts 22:9 is defective, since in this grammatical construction the Greek word translated "heard" really means, "hear with understanding." The New American Standard Bible (NASB) brings this out clearly: "And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me."

KNOWING THE BIBLE USES A LANGUAGE'S STANDARD CONVENTIONS CAN SOLVE PROBLEMS

Other alleged discrepancies may involve conventions or idioms of the language which even today English uses. For example, the Old Testament mentions that Solomon built the Temple of Jehovah in I Kings 6:2: "As for the house which King Solomon built for the Lord . . ." Yet I Kings 5:15-16 states that over 150,000 men worked at building the Temple. Is this a contradiction? No, because I Kings 6:2 expresses the old convention that what a ruler or leader does through others is considered as if he did it himself. Suppose someone said, "Theodore Roosevelt built the Panama Canal." This statement wouldn't draw hardly even a quizzical glance, even though he did little or none of the physical labor in digging the dirt and building the locks in Panama. This explains how Jesus was able to baptize more disciples than John the Baptist despite He didn't physically dunk the people into the water Himself: He had the disciples do it for Him (see John 3:22; 4:1-2).⁶⁵

Further problems might be equally quickly solved, if additional facts were known today that the writers of the Bible knew but we don't. Indeed, some problems may never have a convincing solution this side of Christ's Second Coming. Placing such problems on the shelf of faith, to be taken down and resolved later, is then a sensible approach. Many of the alleged problems can be very decisively cleared up, while others are more difficult to resolve. Of course, the evident discrepancies, or others that could be noted, described above can easily become a stumbling block for people's faith. But when measured against the strong evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible and its fulfilled prophecies, they become the mere excuses and cavils of critics looking for some reason not to believe. They ultimately aren't serious obstacles to belief, except for those not desiring to believe to begin with.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BELIEF

THE GREAT TRILEMMA--JESUS CHRIST: LORD, LIAR, OR LUNATIC?

Many people, including intellectuals, hold the view that Jesus was a good man, a wise teacher, but deny that He was the God in the flesh and the Savior of humanity. Actually, He did not leave this option open to us. Jesus made claims about Himself, or allowed others to without rebuke, that implied or amounted to Deity (see John 5:18; 8:12, 58-59; 10:30-33; 11:25; 14:6; 20:28-29; Matt. 14:31-33; 23:37; 28:17-20; Mark 2:5-10). Although Jesus came to bring a message from God about the kingdom of God, He also came to reveal His identity. His personal claims were far higher than any other prophet's. For example, what prophet of Jehovah ever said (John 14:6), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me"? Is this assertion false? What good is the rest of His moral teaching as found in (say) the Sermon on the Mount, when He is either a pathological liar who claims to be God when He wasn't, or a lunatic so totally divorced from reality that He believes He is Yahweh? As C.S. Lewis comments:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

Similarly, historian Philip Schaff remarks:

This testimony, if not true, must be downright blasphemy or

madness. The former hypothesis cannot stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus, revealed in his every word and work, and acknowledged by universal consent. [Contrast this with the crude struggles of polytheistic gods in the Greek and Babylonian myths. Could they possibly be the sources for Christ's life?--EVS] Self-deception in a matter so momentous, and with an intellect in all respects so clear and sound, is equally out of the question. How could he be an enthusiast or a madman who never lost the even balance of his mind, who sailed serenely over all the troubles and persecutions, as the sun above the clouds, who always returned the wisest answer to tempting questions, who calmly and deliberately predicted his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the founding of his Church, the destruction of Jerusalem--predictions which have been literally fulfilled? A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet, as has been well said, would in this case be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus.⁶⁶

DOES ANY NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE SUPPORT JESUS BEING A MADMAN OR A FRAUD?

So then, when stepping back and considering the contents of the Gospels as a whole, can you honestly say the historical facts point to Jesus being either a pathological liar or an deluded lunatic? You can't, as one higher critic evidently did, totally evade this question, and claim the Gospels are "totally mythological in origin!" Calling the Gospels "myths" doesn't make them so--they hardly read like Homer's Iliad or Odyssey. They are set in a very specific time and place--Judea under Roman rule in the years c. 4 b.c.-31 A.D. If this claim tempts you, sit back some and try to gain some perspective on the Gospels by simply fairly rapidly reading them through in a modern translation, not pausing for long at any one place, while asking this question: "If Jesus isn't the Lord, then what evidence points to Him being either crazy or a con man?" If you can't find any such evidence, you should reconsider the higher critics' fundamental premises. Could someone speak the Sermon on the Mount, rebuke the ones about to stone the woman caught in adultery, praise Peter for recognizing Him as the Messiah and then immediately condemn him for saying He wouldn't be crucified, and so forth--yet either be totally deluded about His own identity or attempting to deceive others about it?⁶⁷ The majesty of Christ's ethics and teachings are undeniable. Unlike the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 b.c.), He stated the Golden Rule only in a positive form, not a negative (see Matt. 7:12). By contrast, the Roman Empire's pagan mystery religions generally were very weak in the ethics department due to focusing on immediate experience of ritual. The question then becomes, when

someone like Christ was watched by so many so long during His ministry, was why His disciples' admiration never flagged, but grew, despite all the trials and opposition they encountered. Wouldn't a madman or a liar break down at some point, such as after being arrested and being put on trial for a capital offense? After all, if Christ wasn't who He said He was, what personal gain was there in being put to death? Wouldn't a con artist then beg for his very life? If he was insane--could he have put up such a facade of even-mindedness that his accusers couldn't detect his true condition? Christ calmly stood silent throughout much of the proceedings before Caiaphas and Pilate, which hardly fits someone who's crazy. Higher critics can't make mealy-mouthed "nice" claims about Jesus being a mere great teacher. They must make a choice when facing the great trilemma, being ready to defend it publicly when rejecting Jesus as Lord: Is Christ a madman or a con artist? Can you reconcile either with the text of the Gospels?

THE PROBLEMS OF THE EMPTY TOMB AND THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection was central bedrock miracle of Christianity. Upon it Christianity rises or falls. Whether Jesus rose from the dead at a specific point and time in history determines whether Christianity is true. As Paul himself commented:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. (I Cor. 15:13-15)

Unlike the legends of Hinduism or myths about Greek gods, Christianity is a religion of history. Certain empirical facts of history have to be true, or else Christianity is a delusion. This historical approach makes it radically different from most other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, animism, witchcraft, etc., or philosophies such as Confucianism or Taoism. To them, history is fundamentally irrelevant to whether they have the Truth or not. They are based on theological dictums or philosophical speculations, not historical events. One well-educated Hindu, a Rama-krishna Mission teacher, thought it "seemed axiomatic that such vital matters of religious truth could not be allowed to depend upon the accidents of history. If the truths which Jesus exemplified and taught are true, then they are true always and everywhere, whether a person called Jesus ever lived or not."⁶⁸ Hence, Christianity can be subjected to historical investigation, verification, and falsification in ways most other religions aren't (although Islam and Judaism are like Christianity here). To compare the Gospels to pagan myths, as some higher critics have done, operates on a fundamentally false premise: They plainly do not read like myths. The Gospels read like truncated biographies or histories that focus on

the life and teachings of one Jesus of Nazareth, who died at a specific place (Judea) and time (31 A.D.) These accounts are placed in the (then) here and now during the authors' lives and the culture out of which they came, instead of some dim past time (creation, etc.) and spiritualized place (Mount Olympus, etc.) If you remain skeptical about this point, it would well be worth some time and effort to read a couple hundred pages of mythology by the Greeks, Romans, and/or Scandinavians first. Then read the New Testament, and compare how it "feels" compared to the ancient pagan myths. The difference should be obvious--but it may not be to those who haven't done so. So if the resurrection happened, and Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true, but if He didn't, Christianity is false.

COULD THE GOSPELS BE MYTHS OR LEGENDS?

It has been claimed the Gospels were myths, which meant they could be discounted just like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey or anyone's stories about the Greek and Roman gods of Zeus, Apollo, Venus, and Mercury. Asserting the Gospels are myths places them in a literary genre that's inconceivable to the informed mind. Calling them "legends" accomplishes little either, when much of the New Testament, perhaps all of it, was written within one generation (40 years) of Jesus' death. Anderson concluded that it is "almost meaningless to talk about legends when you're dealing with the eyewitnesses themselves."⁶⁹ So now, it's time for the rubber to meet the road: Which one of the standard "explanations" by the higher critics for the resurrection should they believe in? Each one of them has serious flaws, and are unsustainable against objections. This means the miraculous is the only sensible explanation for the empty tomb come Sunday morning. (A fundamental premise throughout this essay is that an Almighty God exists, God is actively involved in His creation, miracles can happen, and the natural cannot always explain the natural, which makes the inference to supernatural's existence rational and sensible when reliable historical witnesses testify to its intervention in the world. No one booklet this length can deal with all the objections against belief in Christianity: Skeptics who have read this far are encouraged to consult some of the references in the bibliography if they wish to do more research). McDowell has done much work on the subject of the resurrection. This material is freely but briefly drawn on below.⁷⁰

WHY DENYING THE TOMB WAS EMPTY IS IMPLAUSIBLE

Confronting the skeptic is this basic problem: How can he or she explain the fact of an empty tomb come one Sunday morning during the Days of Unleavened Bread in (most likely) 31 A.D.? Apparent archeological evidence for this comes in a mangled form from the Nazareth stone the Roman government set up in Jesus' hometown. It proclaims an imperial edict that warns its readers against messing around with graves and tombs, with heavy punishments to match! Evidently, word about the stir the resurrection created got back to Rome in a garbled form through Pilate or someone else, resulting in

this off-key response!⁷¹ Attempts to deny the tomb's emptiness simply aren't believable, especially when judging from the actions of Christianity's enemies. Suppose you argue like Lake, that the women went to the wrong tomb, or Guignebert, that the disciples didn't know which tomb Jesus was placed in. The reactions of the authorities themselves shoot down these claims amidst the growing commotion created by the disciples' preaching from the Day of Pentecost onwards in Judea and elsewhere. Some elementary investigation by them would have quickly disposed of the matter, such as by asking Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin himself) where his tomb was. Furthermore, would the Romans have guarded the wrong tomb? Christianity could have been strangled in the cradle by simply producing the body of Jesus, perhaps by presenting it on an ox cart rolled down the main streets of Jerusalem. Who could believe that Jesus had risen right after seeing His dead body? The preaching about Christianity's claims did not begin in some place far from where Jesus Himself had lived, such as Athens, where checking up on His followers' claims would have been difficult. Furthermore, statements by hostile or unsympathetic witnesses in the New Testament (which is the strongest kind of historical evidence possible--concessions to the enemy) show the Jewish leadership knew the tomb was empty, and that they didn't know where the body of Jesus was. Why else would have they have bribed the guards at the tomb to spread the story that (Matt. 28:11): "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep"? Instead, they would have said, "We know where the body is, and we'll show it to you now." Gamaliel was a leading rabbi and member of the Sanhedrin, which ruled the Jews subject to restrictions imposed by Rome. Consider the implications of his fence-straddling statement that we can't be certain if this movement is of God or of men, so we should be careful about punishing these men for preaching about Jesus (Acts 5:34-40). It's inconceivable he would say this if the body of Jesus could be shown to people and/or the Jewish leadership had it. Obviously, Gamaliel simply didn't know where it was, nor his friends on the Sanhedrin, so he counseled caution. Anyway, could have the women or the disciples have all gone to the wrong tomb? Would have they forgotten where their loved one lay?

THE GUARDS WERE ROMANS, NOT THE JEWISH TEMPLE GUARD

The guards in question almost certainly were Romans, not the Temple guard, unlike what some have said. Would have the elders of the Jews bribed their own temple guard? Furthermore, since the standard penalty in the Roman legions for falling asleep while on guard duty was death, it would make sense the soldiers in question would appeal to the Jewish leadership (someone outside the chain of command) to save their skins. Appealing to any Roman officer or leader would surely be of no avail, and a swift, summary death would soon be their fate. Anyway, could have Jewish guards be bribed into lying about their Messiah? The dispute over the composition of the guard is based on Pilate's positive response to the chief priests and Pharisees' request. They

wanted a guard placed on Jesus' tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and claiming He rose from the dead. Note Matt. 28:65: "Pilate said to them, You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." If this command is in the imperative, it would mean (as Alford says) "Take a body of men for a guard." Logically, the Jews wouldn't ask Pilate for a Roman guard had they intended to use their own guards to begin with. Also, the Greek word translated guard, "koustodian," which comes from Latin, really is weighted towards meaning some detachment of Roman troops, especially the guard unit of a Roman legion. Then, consider the implications of the Jewish leadership promising to the Roman guards who fell asleep when Jesus rose from the dead (Matt. 28:14): "if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." If the troops were Temple guards, which they fully controlled, why refer to Pilate's (Roman) authority over them?⁷²

WERE THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES HALLUCINATIONS?

Were the resurrection appearances mere hallucinations? This is another way to contend Jesus' body still lay in the tomb, while still trying to explain what transformed the disciples' behavior from cowards in hiding into men silencible only by death. This theory suffers from numerous deadly flaws. Its biggest problem is that those who suffer from hallucinations imagine what they expect to see and desire to see. However, the disciples plainly were NOT anticipating Jesus to rise from the dead. Even afterwards, according to the New Testament itself, some still had doubts. Expecting Jesus to be the Conquering Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, they thought He would install them as His top lieutenants under His rule (Matt. 18:1; 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 22:24-30). The disciples had a long, hard time unlearning the prevailing Jewish view of what the Messiah would do when He appeared. It took the crucifixion and the resurrection to pound it out of them. Even then, the change wasn't instantaneous. Not until some time after Jesus' resurrection did they understand the truth that the Messiah came the first time to suffer and die for humanity's sins, not to rule the earth then (Acts 1:6-8). (However, judging from their question in Matt. 24:3, they had at least some glimmer that Jesus would come again). They repeatedly refused to believe or even understand His prophecies of His own impending crucifixion and resurrection. Christ praised Peter for saying He was the Messiah, but then blasted him for refusing to believe that: "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matt. 16:21; cf. Mark 9:31; Luke 9:22-26; Luke 17:25; Matt. 17:12, 19, 22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus on another occasion told His disciples (Mark 9:31): "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." The New Testament then affirms that the disciples didn't understand this. (This incident illustrates how it again and again reveals the imperfections and flaws of the founders of Christianity under Jesus, showing it was hardly a mindlessly partisan document). "And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that

were said" (Luke 18:34). The New Testament repeatedly notes disciples' lack of faith about Jesus' resurrection, including even after it happened! (See Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:11, 41; John 20:25). The resurrected Christ rebuked them for their unbelief (Mark 16:14): "And after He appeared to the eleven [disciples/apostles] themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." The disciples were not going to hallucinate about something--the resurrected Christ--that they didn't really expect to happen to begin with. The women who carried the spices to the tomb early Sunday morning obviously expected to find Jesus dead, not alive!

HALLUCINATIONS NEED CERTAIN TYPES OF PEOPLE AND EXPERIENCES TO BE POSSIBLE

Other problems abound with claiming the resurrection appearances were hallucinations. Normally hallucinations only afflict the paranoid and (especially) the schizophrenic. These psychological labels hardly describe the disciples, with hard-headed fishermen and a former tax collector among them. Among the disciples were Philip, who was rather skeptical (John 6:5-7; 14:8-10), and doubting Thomas (John 20:24-29), who demanded decisive empirical evidence that he could touch, not just see. Such men are not the kinds prone to hallucinations. Hallucinations also are highly individualized occurrences--it's absurd to posit that two people, let alone groups of them, would have the same one. Paul maintained some 500 saw the resurrected Jesus (I Cor. 15:6). Did they all hallucinate the same thing? Neurobiologist Raoul Mourgue maintains that hallucinating "is not a static phenomenon but essentially a dynamic process, the instability of which reflects the very instability of the factors and conditions associated with its origin." The appearances of the resurrected Christ were sustained close encounters, which included Him eating dinner with the disciples, His invitations for the disciples to touch Him, His speaking with them, and appearing under difference circumstances before different people (Luke 24:39-43; Matt. 28:9-10; John 20:25-27). If they were only hallucinations, wouldn't some have suddenly realized that they were only seeing things part way through the encounter? When normal people are uncertain of what one sense tells them--when they suspect they are hallucinating--they examine what their other senses are telling them as a check.

Psychiatrists Hinsie and Shatsky note that "in a normal individual this false belief usually brings the desire to check often another sense or other senses may come to the rescue and satisfy him that it is merely an illusion."⁷³ Jesus' resurrection appearances involved all three major cognitive senses, not just sight. All these factors decisively militate against believing hallucinations could explain how the disciples' behavior was so utterly transformed almost literally overnight.

DID THE DISCIPLES STEAL THE BODY?

Once the truth of an empty tomb is established, how can it be explained? One standard explanation, which Matthew himself alludes to (Matt. 28:13; 27:63), claims that the disciples stole the body, concealed it, and proclaimed Jesus was alive. What problems does this face? First, consider the Roman guard the Jewish authorities so thoughtfully placed around the tomb, complete with the imperial seal (Matt. 27:62-66). The Roman guards were extremely capable soldiers. The death penalties threatened upon soldiers sleeping while on guard duty produced discipline and a "faultless attention to duty, especially during the night watch," according to the historian Dr. George Currie.⁷⁴ If the disciples had approached the tomb with the intent of stealing the body, one of these trained professional soldiers, let alone two or three, could have easily dispatched all of them. Second, as alluded to above, after Jesus' arrest, the disciples fled and hid (Matt. 26:56). Later, even impetuous Peter, fearful of being recognized as one of Jesus' followers, denied Him three times. Could have these frightened, disorganized men, who did not expect or really believe Jesus was to rise to begin with, be able even to plan such a heist, let alone pull off such a brilliant would-be coup? With their Messiah dead on the cross, they obviously thought their grand hopes of a future filled with ruling the nations under Him were equally defunct. Third, the testimony of their lives morally points to the impossibility of them being such intentional deceivers. True, they had their moral flaws, especially before conversion, as the New Testament makes plain. (This shows its objectivity, just as the Old Testament reveals the imperfections of David, Jacob, and Abraham). Nevertheless, pulling off a vast intentional deceit would be totally out of character for them. Why establish a religion that condemns lying upon a base of fraud? As religious Jews, they would still have feared God's wrath if they lied about Him. Fourth, would the disciples die for a lie that they knew was a lie? Wouldn't one or more of them, when given the chance, deny Jesus rose from the dead when put on trial for their lives? In Pliny the Younger's message to the Emperor Trajan (quoted from above), as well as when the early Christian leader Polycarp was martyred (A.D. 155), the Romans offered the Christians in question the chance to save their skins, if they would deny Christ. By and large, the Romans weren't out to kill Christians for the sake of killing them. They merely sought restore them to paganism and civic loyalty by forcing them to repent enough to sacrifice to the emperor and/or to renounce Jesus. By tradition, eleven of the twelve apostles died martyrs. What good is dying for some cause you know is false, when no personal gain is possible from continuing to uphold it, and by abandoning it, you could save your life? Fifth, even if the guards did fall asleep, could they have remained so as the disciples tiptoed past them to move the tomb's huge covering stone? It likely weighed between one and a half to two tons! The guards would have to be totally deaf to miss the ensuing commotion--who may have been 16 in number. All these objections make the ancient Jewish claim that the disciples stole the body insufferably implausible.

THE SWOON THEORY WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING

Another attempted naturalistic (non-supernatural) explanation for the resurrection maintains Jesus did NOT actually die on the cross, but merely fainted. Then after being entombed, he revived in its cool air. The masses of evidence pointing to Jesus' death destroy this theory. It's impossible to believe He was actually still alive. First, Jesus was scourged. This was not a mere whipping with (say) a standard horse or bull whip. The whip likely had one or more leather cords or thongs attached to a handle, sometimes with pieces of metal or bones weighted or knotted in to make it more effective in cutting the flesh. According to the early church historian Eusebius, the standard scourging laid bare the victim's veins and "the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure." As a result, Jesus was already greatly weakened when He was nailed onto the cross, as His evident inability to carry the beam of His cross (or stake?) to His place of execution indicates (Luke 23:26). Even when rescued from the cross before death overtook them, crucifixion victims seldom lived. The Romans crucified three of Josephus's friends while they quelled the 66-70 A.D. revolt in Judea. Josephus appealed to Titus, the Roman general in charge (and future emperor) to have them taken down. Although his request was granted, two of them still died shortly thereafter. The Roman soldiers serving as executioners were presumably experienced in knowing what dead men looked like. Finding Jesus was dead already, they noted the two thieves crucified with Him weren't by contrast (John 19:32-33): "The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." They broke the legs of the thieves to bring a sudden end to their lives. Crucifixion victims need the support of their legs, or else asphyxiation soon followed. Since they have to keep lifting themselves up to breathe, their arms would soon tire working by themselves, and they would die from a lack of air.

JESUS WAS KILLED BY A SPEAR BEING THROWN INTO HIS BACK

This treatment wasn't necessary for Jesus. Why? Note what should be read as a parenthetical statement in John 19:34: "one of the soldiers [had] pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." Compare this to Matt. 27:49-50 in the Moffatt translation: "(Seizing a lance, another pricked [pierced] his side, and out came water and blood.) Jesus again uttered a loud scream, and gave up his spirit." Most major translations are missing part of verse 49 (although Moffatt and Fenton have it). It actually has reasonable manuscript support: It's found in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, as well as Codex Ephraemi, L, 5, 48, 67, 115, 127, 1010, five good copies of the Latin Vulgate, the Jerusalem Syriac (Aramaic), and the Ethiopic. Normally, this manuscript support would be enough to earn it a place in the critical text (of Westcott-Hort, etc.). Evidently, translators omit it because John appears to contradict Matthew about whether the spear was thrown into Jesus' back before or after His death. The "contradiction" can easily be resolved by noting John was using an aorist past tense in a parenthetical comment. (In the Greek

language, the aorist tense refers to something having occurred at one point in time in the past, or at widely separated points in time). Therefore, after suffering on the cross for about six hours, Jesus was dramatically slain by a spear while still alive, but the soldiers instead simply broke the legs of the thieves to hasten them to their untimely ends.⁷⁵

FURTHER PROOF THAT JESUS REALLY WAS DEAD

Still more evidence points to Jesus' death. Being a secret follower of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Pilate summoned the centurion who presided over the crucifixion. After asking him "whether He [Jesus] was already dead," he handed over Jesus' corpse to Joseph (Mark 15:43-45). Along with Nicodemus's help, who supplied some hundred pounds of spices to be wrapped underneath the body's burial linen, Joseph laid it in a new tomb he owned (John 19:38-42). Not only had the Roman common soldiers determined that Jesus was dead, but their officer along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did as well. Even IF Jesus hadn't died from being scourged, crucified, and speared, traditional Jewish burial practices would have finished the job via suffocation. Using a sticky, gummy substance to hold it all together, they tightly wrapped dead bodies with linen after placing spices underneath. Then for three days and three nights, He would have had no food or water, or medical help for His wounds. With the boulder having been rolled up against the tomb's entrance, causing the tomb soon to fill with the odor of the spices, He would have received no fresh air. The swoon theory also faces further problems: Could have a bloody, wounded, weakened man not only unwrap himself, but push open the tomb's boulder? The women who arrived at the tomb Sunday morning "saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large" (Mark 16:4). Could have Jesus gotten by and/or overcome the soldiers guarding the tomb? Could have a battered, bleeding man appearing before His disciples transform them from cowards to heroes? As Keim says, cited by Thorburn:

Then there is the most impossible thing of all; the poor, weak Jesus, with difficulty holding Himself erect, in hiding, disguised, and finally dying--this Jesus an object of faith, of exalted emotion, of the triumph of His adherents, a risen conqueror, and Son of God! Here, in fact, the theory begins to grow paltry, absurd, worthy only of rejection.

The accounts of the risen Jesus passing through walls and suddenly appearing and disappearing (Luke 24:36-37; Mark 16:4; John 19:4; 20:1) and being able to conceal His identity at will (Luke 24:31) hardly fits the Swoon theory's claim Jesus underwent a mere resuscitation. Although he was a higher critic who sharply attacked the Gospels' supernatural aspects, David Strauss still saw the Swoon theory as absurd:

It is impossible that a being who has been stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting

medical treatment; who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac [mournful] voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.⁷⁶

The theory that Jesus merely spontaneously recovered physically in the tomb is the sheerest nonsense. It's amazing that it once was a major way eighteenth-century Enlightenment scholars attempted to explain away the resurrection naturally, without invoking miracles.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DISCIPLES' TRANSFORMED BEHAVIOR

In any attempt to explain away the resurrection, the transformed behavior of the disciples must always be reckoned with. After Jesus' arrest, these men fled. The leading disciple, Simon Peter, denied Jesus three times upon the mere casual questioning by others around him. They hid away, afraid that the Jewish leadership would claim their lives, just as it had Jesus'. But then, suddenly, within fifty-four days of Jesus' death, they went into Jerusalem's streets preaching Jesus as the Messiah, repeatedly publicly accusing their fellow Jews of killing the Messiah (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10). These simple men, fishermen and whatnots, even withstood the commands of their nation's top leaders on the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in Jesus' name. Peter defiantly replied to them (Acts 5:29-30): "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross." THIS--from the man who some weeks earlier was so frightened that he denied Jesus to a mere servant girl? (Luke 22:56) Why the change? The disciples, if they were lying, knew it was a lie. Could have a lie that they knew was a lie have so utterly transformed their lives? Furthermore, being (post-Pentecost at least) fundamentally upright men upholding a religion that prohibited lying have been so deceitful? Would you die for a lie, knowing that admitting it would save your life? When persecuting Christians, the Romans often offered them their lives on the condition of denying Jesus and/or offering the pinch of incense to the emperor as a god. If they had concocted such a gigantic lie, it's hard to believe that none of them would ever break down under pressure. By tradition, eleven of the twelve apostles paid for their beliefs with their lives, with only John dying naturally. SOMETHING happened to so utterly change their psychology so dramatically. What was it, if not the miracle of their leader, the Messiah, coming to back to life?

THE DIFFERENCES FROM THE ALLEGED EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY FOR THE BOOK OF MORMON

Don't assume that other religions could come up with similarly reliable eyewitness evidence for their faith's historical basis. The supposed witnesses for the Book of Mormon present a stark contrast to those for Jesus' resurrection.

Of the two groups of witnesses listed at this book's beginning, the three witnesses and the eight witnesses, only the three Smiths, members of the same family as Joseph Smith, remained in the Latter-day Saint (Mormon) Church until the end of their lives. The three witnesses supposedly had seen an angel show them the plates that Joseph Smith allegedly translated the Book of Mormon from. Later on, all three of them had visions that contradicted what Smith had received. Joseph Smith himself later called all eight of the defectors liars and cheats "too mean to mention." He accused two of the three witnesses of being part of a "gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars and blacklegs."⁷⁷

WHY ATTACKS ON THE BIBLE'S RELIABILITY ARE FAULTY

Now having considered some of the standard arguments against belief in the Bible as a contradictory, ahistorical document, what has survived? Above, the Bible has been shown to be historically reliable, and that its supposed "contradictions" can be explained. The discoveries of archeology and the preserved writings of various pagan historians mostly agree with it. Any remaining discrepancies are something apt even by secular standards to be resolved in the Bible's favor in the future, as Jericho's case shows. The Bible's text can be determined to be reliable, as the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries indicate. The argument from silence and the assumption nothing supernatural (from God) could have led to the Bible's writing have been both exposed as fallacies. Undeniable evidence for Jesus rising from the dead exists for those with open minds: The evidence from ANY ancient historian is more easily denied than that for the New Testament. Since the Bible is reliable in what can be checked, it's a perfectly rational inference (by induction) that what can't be checked (its specific miracles) did happen or is true. The majesty of Christian ethics, such as shown by its superior definition of love compared to Plato's dialog Symposium, is so different from the run of pagan Roman mystery religions! Higher critics, especially liberal Christians who don't believe Jesus was God and the Savior of humanity, have to face the implications of the great trilemma. They should explain who and what Jesus was--if He wasn't the Lord, He had to be a deceiver or a madman--and give the evidence from the pages of the New Testament for their choice. Higher critics should reply to the standard conservative/fundamentalist Christian scholarship, something which Bill Moyers' series on the Book of Genesis on PBS intentionally omitted. Judging from their poor track record over the past 150 years, it's time to be more skeptical of the skeptics themselves. Time and again, the skeptics' claims against the Bible have been proven false; Why should you believe in them instead of it? It's time to be open-minded towards, and accept, the Bible as the word of God.

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE QURAN (KORAN) OF ISLAM

Although a thorough-going critique of the Quran (Koran) is beyond the scope of this booklet, some brief points still need to be made in the light of Islam's fast-growing popularity in the American black community today. Although a standard Muslim claim says the Quran has no textual variations, this is in fact incorrect. No one original manuscript of the Quran ever existed, since Muhammad (c. 570-632 A.D.) didn't write any of it. Instead various followers wrote scattered revelations on whatever material came to hand, including pieces of papyrus, tree bark, palm leaves and mats, stones, the ribs and shoulder blades of animals, etc. Otherwise, they memorized them. These disparate materials were susceptible to loss: Ali Dashti, a Islamic statesman, said animals sometimes ate mats or the palm leaves on which Suras (chapters of the Quran) were written! After his death, Muhammad's revelations were gathered together to eliminate the chaos. (Even Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church did better than this: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today possesses the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon). To solve the problems of conflicting memories and possibly lost or varying written materials, Caliph Uthman (ruled 644-56) had the text of the Quran forcibly standardized. He commanded manuscripts with alternative readings to be burned. But he didn't fully succeed, since variations are still known to have existed and some still do. The Sura Al-Saff had 200 verses in the days of Muhammad's later wife Ayesha, but Uthman's version had only 52. Morey says Shiite Muslims claim Uthman cut out a quarter of the Quran's verses for political reasons. In his manuscript of the Quran, Ubai had a few Suras that Uthman omitted from the standardized version. Arthur Jeffrey, in his Materials for the History of the Text of the Quran, gives 90 pages of variant readings for the Quran's text, finding 140 alone for Sura 2. When the Western scholar Bertrasser sought to photograph a rare Kufic manuscript of the Quran which had "certain curious features" in Cairo, the Egyptian Library suddenly withdrew it, and denied him access to it.

MUHAMMAD'S REVISIONS OF EARLIER REVELATIONS

Even when originally first written, certain problems existed, since Muhammad would make mistakes or corrections to revelations he had made. Before documenting examples of verses removed from the Quran, Arabic scholar E. Wherry explained first: "There being some passages in the Quran which are contradictory, the Muhammadan doctors obviate any objection from thence by the doctrine of abrogation; for they say GOD in the Quran commanded several things which were for good reasons afterwards revoked and abrogated." One follower of Muhammad, Abdollah Sarh, often made suggestions about subtracting, adding, or rephrasing Suras to him that he accepted. Later, Abdollah renounced Islam because if these revelations had

come from God, they shouldn't have been changed at his suggestion. (Later, after taking Mecca, Muhammad made sure Abdollah was one of the first people he had executed). Muhammad had the curious policy of renouncing verses of the Quran that he spoke in error. In the Satanic verses incident he briefly capitulated to polytheism by allowing Allah's followers to worship the goddesses Al-Lat, Al-Uzzah, and Manat (see Sura 53:19; cf. 23:51) (Note that the title of Salman Rushdie's novel, The Satanic Verses, alludes to this incident. For writing this book he was sentenced to death by Iranian dictator Ayatollah Khomeini). Could anyone imagine Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah doing something similar? Did Muhammad's God make mistakes that required corrections?

WHY EVEN BY SECULAR LOGIC THE QURAN IS LESS RELIABLE THAN THE BIBLE

Another problem of the Quran is that its teachings and stories in many cases contradict the Bible. Theologically, for Islam, this poses a major problem, because the Quran itself says the Bible is composed of earlier revelations from the same God. Hence, if the Bible's different version of some event or person's life is correct but contradicts the Quran's, then the Quran's own appeal to the Bible's authority is proven false. Hence, Muslims can't just throw away the Bible completely, but have to claim this or that part of it was corrupted, while the Quran has the right version. But now logically, granted the standard principles of the bibliographical test described above, since the Bible was finished about 500 years before the Quran, it is the more reliable document. In many cases, eyewitnesses wrote the Bible, or second-hand reporters using eyewitness accounts. Muslims may routinely claim the Bible has been corrupted, but the textual evidence shows otherwise: The variations in the Old and New Testaments are actually smaller than the textual problems the Quran ultimately faces, which Uthman's actions to standardize it merely paper over. Furthermore, what textual variations the Bible does have don't bend towards Islamic theology in any kind of systematic manner. For example, the Quran denies the crucifixion of Christ. There are no New Testament variations that deny the crucifixion. Furthermore, by secular logic alone, who is more reliable about this? An eyewitness such as John, or Mark as informed by Peter? Or someone writing 500+ years later who never even saw Jesus alive? Since Muhammad did maintain his revelations built upon the Bible, seeing it as coming from the same God, the two shouldn't conflict--but of course, they do.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AS A PROPHET OF GOD AND OTHER HISTORICAL MISTAKES

Consider some sample contradictions and historical inaccuracies of the Quran as compared to the Bible. The Quran says the world was made in eight days (2+4+2--Sura 41:9, 10, 12), while the Bible says six in Genesis 1. Then, still more problematically, the Quran elsewhere says it was made in six days

(Sura 7:52, 10:3). The Quran says one of Noah's sons chose to die in the flood, and that the Ark landed on Mount Judi, not Ararat (Sura 11:44-46). "Azar" becomes the name of Abraham's father, not Terah (Sura 6:4). The Quran also blunders by asserting Alexander the Great (Zul-quarain) was a true prophet of God (see Sura 18:82-98). Secular history proves this to be patently absurd. Alexander was a thorough-going pagan who never knew Jehovah, the God of Israel.

CHRONOLOGICAL MISTAKES IN THE QURAN

The Quran often gets its chronology skewered, putting together as living at the same time who may have lived centuries apart according to the Bible. This occurred because Muhammad evidently got many of the stories second and third hand orally, ultimately often from apocryphal sources such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Barnabas, not from the Bible itself. For example, the Quran portrays Haman, the prime minister for King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, ruled 486-474 b.c.) of the Persian Empire as Pharaoh's chief minister when Moses challenged the king of Egypt (c. 1445 b.c.) (see Sura 28:38; 29:38; 40:25-27, 38-39). Another leading error of the Quran occurs by mixing up Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, who had lived some 1400 years earlier. Note Sura 19:29-30: "Then came she with the babe to her people, bearing him. They said, "O Mary! now hast thou done a strange thing! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of wickedness, nor unchaste thy mother." In a footnote to his translation of the Quran, Dawood tries to rescue Muhammad by saying it was an idiomatic expression in Arabic meaning "virtuous woman." But elsewhere the Quran refutes this interpretation, because Muhammad asserts the father of Mary was Imran, Moses' father!. Note Sura 66:12: "And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who kept her maidenhood, and into whose womb We breathed of Our Spirit . . ." The father of Moses and Miriam, according to the Bible, was Amram (Ex. 6:20; Num. 26:59). The Virgin Mary's father was Eli or Heli (Luke 3:23--see above for details). Muhammad confuses King Saul with the earlier judge Gideon. At God's inspiration, Gideon reduced Israel's army in size by eliminating those who drank from the water in one way rather than another (compare Judges 7:4-7 with Sura 2:250). Another mistake, although it may be obscured in translation, concerns "The Samaritan" deceiving the children of Israel into worshiping the Golden Calf at the base of Mt. Sinai (mid-fifteenth century b.c.). Later settling in the Holy Land centuries later, the Samaritans didn't exist until after the Assyrians had taken Israel into captivity (late eighth century b.c. and afterwards--see II Kings 17:22-41). Rodwell translates "Samiri" here, but according to Morey, this obscures the real meaning in Arabic (see Sura 20:87, 90, 96).

ISLAM: THE CULT OF THE MOON GOD ALLAH?

Further problems with the Quran could be explained, but this suffices for our purposes here. Although few Muslims know this, the religion of

Muhammad's ancestors and his tribe the Quraysh involved the worship of Allah, the name of the moon god, in pre-Islamic times in Arabia. Anciently an idol was set up for Allah near the Kabah, where today Muslims travel in pilgrimages to Mecca, Saudi Arabia to walk around. In myth, Allah married the sun-goddess, and they together had three goddesses named Al-Lat, Al-Uzzah, and Manat. It's hard to over-emphasize the significance of the truth that "Allah" was the name of the moon god in Arabia before the time of Muhammad. It's no coincidence that during the "Satanic Verses" incident when Muhammad weakened against idolatry briefly, he had allowed the same three goddesses to be worshiped. Even today, the standard symbol Islam uses to represent itself is (along with a single star) the crescent moon! (It's not sensibly seen as just a symbol for Ramadan, the month of fasting during the daytime). Evidently, Muhammad took a pre-existing pagan moon god of Arabia, and then applied to this false god various stories ultimately from the Bible and apocryphal literature about the True God. As Morey summarizes: "The cult of the moon god which worshipped Allah was transformed by Muhammad into a monotheistic faith." Compared to the Almighty God of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, the God of the Quran is a limited god who "inspired" the writing of historically inaccurate, contradictory revelations.⁷⁸

FOR FURTHER READING

Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982). F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1960); The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988). Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) [This work is by a secular historian, and not a believer in the Messiah]. Norman L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1976). Jehovah's Witnesses, The Bible: God's Word or Man's? (New York: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1989). C.S. Lewis, Miracles: A Preliminary Study (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1960); The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962); Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952); C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970). Paul Little, Know Why You Believe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988). John Warwick Montgomery, Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991). Josh McDowell, More than a Carpenter (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986); Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), vol 1; More Evidence that Demands a Verdict (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981); The Resurrection Factor (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981); with Don Stewart, Answers to Tough Questions (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986); with Bill Wilson, He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993). J.P. Moreland, Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1987). Frank Morison, Who Moved the Stone? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958). Henry Morris, Scientific Creationism (El Cajon, CA: Master Books, 1974); Henry M. Morris and Henry M. Morris, III, Many Infallible Proofs: Evidences for the Christian Faith (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1996). Ronald Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow From Pagan Thought? (Richardson, Texas: Probe Books, 1992). Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968). R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, Classical Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984). [Warning!--only for the determined reader!]

ENDNOTES

- 1 . Floyd E. Hamilton, The Basis of the Christian Faith (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1927), p. 310, as cited in Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 296-309; John A. Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," in John Warwick Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991), pp. 184-86; Orley Berg, Treasures in the Sand (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), p. 203.
- 2 . Herman L. Hoeh, "A New Look at Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre," The Authority of the Bible (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1980), pp. 8-10; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 272-80; Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 181-83; Aid to Bible Understanding (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1971), p. 1622.
- 3 . McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 280-81; Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, p. 183; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, gen. ed., International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBN) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), vol. 4, p. 501.
- 4 . Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1307; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 283-85; Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 183-84.
- 5 . Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 179-81; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 294-96; R.F. Youngblood, "Thebes," Bromiley, ed., ISBN, vol. 4, p. 824; Herbert Lockyer Sr., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), p. 761.
- 6 . McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 295-96, 307.
- 7 . McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 287-93; Keith N. Schoville, Biblical Archaeology in Focus (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 485.
- 8 . Herbert W. Armstrong, The Middle East in Prophecy (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1972), pp. 2-3.
- 9 . Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 283; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, p. 210; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 270-72; Lockyer, ed., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 368; Herodotus, The Histories, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 488-89; Bloom, "Truth Via Prophecy," Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 176-77; The Bible: God's Word or Man's? (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989), pp. 40-41.

10 . McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 308.

11 . Josh McDowell, More than a Carpenter (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), pp. 47-59; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 39-43; F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?, fifth ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1960), pp. 19-20.

12 . This may be implicitly building upon average people's skepticism of ancient texts, ignoring the reality that textual criticism has its scientific aspects. Textual criticism is also used in analyzing documents that aren't sacred in origin. See C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics, ed., Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 95.

13 . William Foxwell Albright, Christianity Today, Jan. 18, 1963; William Foxwell Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1946), p. 23; John A. Robinson, Redating the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1976), all as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 62-63; R.T. France, The Evidence for Jesus (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 119-20; Simon Kistemaker, The Gospels in Current Study (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 48 and/or 49, as cited by Josh McDowell, More Evidence that Demands a Verdict (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 210.

14 . J.P. Moreland, Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 152-54.

15 . Laurence J. McGinley, Form Criticism of the Synoptic Healing Narratives (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College Press, 1944), p. 25; James Martin, The Reliability of the Gospels (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959), p. 103-104; John Warwick Montgomery, History and Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964, p. 37, all as cited by McDowell, More Evidence, pp. 211-13; Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 142-44, 156; Norman Anderson, Jesus Christ: The Witness of History (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p. 31.

16 . William F. Albright, Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136, as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 62-63.

17 . See Robert A. Morey, The New Atheism and the Erosion of Freedom (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986), p. 112. He cites in turn David Estrada and William White Jr., The First New Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978). James C. VanderKam sounds a skeptical note in The Dead Sea Scrolls After Forty Years (Washington, DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 1991), p. 35; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 42-43.

18 . Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament (Chicago: Moody Press,

1964), p. 19; William Henry Green, General Introduction to the Old Testament--The Text (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 181; Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 263, all as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 56, 58.

19

Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 114. This book is heavily depended upon throughout this section analyzing the J E D P theory.

20

Ibid.

21

Ibid., p. 129.

22

Ibid., pp. 105, 115.

23

Ibid., p. 135.

24 . G.N. Stanton in "Ancient Biographical Writing," Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching--see E.C. Blackman, "Jesus Christ Yesterday: The Historical Basis of the Christian Faith," Canadian Journal of Theology (April 1961), vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 118-27; Stanley N. Gundry, "A Critique of the Fundamental Assumption of Form Criticism, Part I," Bibliotheca Sacra (April 1966), no. 489, pp. 32-39; see also J.P. Moreland's Th.M. Thesis, 1979, Dallas Theological Seminary, p. 87; my emphasis, W.E. Barnes, Gospel Criticism and Form Criticism (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), from pp. 11-16; T.W. Manson, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus--Continues," Studies in the Gospels and Epistles, ed. Matthew Black (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1962), all as cited in McDowell, More Evidence, pp. 266-68; Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, p. 140.

25 . Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, p. 141; Barnes, Gospel Criticism, pp. 15 and/or 16; E.L. Abel, "Psychology of Memory and Rumor Transmission and Their Bearing on Theories of Oral Transmission in Early Christianity," Journal of Religion (Oct. 1971), vol. 51, pp. 375-76, the last two as in McDowell, More Evidence, pp. 266, 272. This goes against form criticism because it normally maintains the original story was the more simple, not the more complex and detailed, saying later generations of Christians added more details. In point of fact, the more detailed the (historical) account, the more likely it was the original one, based on research by Abel and others on how humans remember things.

26 . Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 136-38.

27 . Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 141, 145-47.

28 . Even they comment that "the same basic story is contained both in the majority text and in the other texts, and that no crucial doctrine of the Christian faith rests upon the 10% that is in dispute." Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 48. To gain a feel for the differences

involved, you should consult the second apparatus (second set of footnotes) that compares the Received text with the Critical text in the following edition of the Greek New Testament: Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, 2d ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). A casual look at the second apparatus indicates much of this "10%" is composed of switches in order, the substitution of one word for another often similar in form, or the addition or omission of articles and prepositions. By using a Greek/English interlinear in comparison with this Greek New Testament, you could see what the practical differences are between the two. Using simultaneously two interlinears, one containing the Critical text, such as the Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1985), and another having the Received text, such as Jay P. Green's The Interlinear Bible Hebrew-Greek-English (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), would aid in this process for those seriously inclined to pursue it, but who can't read Greek. Benjamin Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1942), with its hybrid text and its notes comparing its Greek text with Vaticanus, may interest those wishing to do some amateur textual criticism.

29 . David Otis Fuller, ed., Which Bible? (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), pp. 168, 169. For anyone seeking a solid defense of the Received text, this book is a good place to start.

30 . C.F. Sitterly and J.H. Greenlee, "Text and MSS of the NT," Bromiley, gen. ed., ISBN, vol. 4, p. 818; Abbott cited in Benjamin B. Warfield, Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament, 7th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 14; Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 365; Philip Schaff, Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 177, the last three as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 43-44; as found in Otis, Which Bible?, p. 119.

31 . For the two lists of words, evidence that Jesus could have spoken Greek, and general evidence for the overall Jewishness of the Gospel accounts, see Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pp. 233-61; William G. Most, Catholic Apologetics Today: Answers to Modern Critics Does It Make Sense to Believe? (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1986), pp. 44-47; my emphasis, Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, book 20, chapter 11, section 2; Hellenism (Bentwich, 1919), p. 115, as cited in Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 693; see also Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, p. 147.

32 . Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989), p. 305. Please note that Fox is not a Christian.

33 . Aid to Bible Understanding, pp. 693-94. Similarly, Price maintains the weight of the evidence favors seeing Matthew as a Jewish Christian for these reasons: (1) His respect for Jewish law [as reflected in the words of Jesus]

(Matt. 5:17-20; 24:20; 23:23). (2) His recording that the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Matt. 23:2-3). (3) "His use of rabbinical modes of argumentation from scripture--all of these things, combined with his sharp hostility toward scribes and Pharisees who oppose Jesus (23:13, 29-33), make credible the view that the First Evangelist was formerly a scribe of the sect of the Pharisees [This is admittedly speculative--EVS]. . . . Matthew's universal outlook and undoubted support of the Gentile mission does not obscure his concern to affirm, not reject, his own and others' Jewish past." James L. Price, The New Testament: Its History and Theology (Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 158. 33.

34 . F.F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 277. This book should be consulted by all those with particular concerns on this issue, as well Bruce Metzger's The Canon of the New Testament (Oxford, 1987). M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament, p. xii; G. Milligan, The New Testament Documents, p. 228; Kurt Aland, The Problem of the New Testament Canon (1962), p. 24, all three as cited in "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial" (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1963), p. 303; Ned B. Stonehouse, "The Authority of the New Testament," The Infallible Word (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1946), as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 36. The real parameters of disputes over the canon in the third century concerned a relatively small part of the New Testament, and none of the Gospels. Furthermore, only some Christians doubted this or that book, not huge chunks of the Church. See France, Evidence for Jesus, pp. 123-24. For those interested in briefly surveying the flavor and quality of the apocryphal gospels, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 90-105.

35 . Jerome as cited by Bruce, Canon of Scripture, pp. 226-27; Aland, The Problem of the New Testament Canon, p. 18, as cited in "All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial," p. 301; Bruce, Canon of Scripture, p. 217; see also McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 37.

36 . See Bruce, New Testament Documents, p. 27. He says it is wrong to think the church's reaction against Marcion's advocacy of a clipped canon (c. 140 A.D.) was the first time the church became serious about formalizing the canon. Instead, the challenge of heresy speeded up the process (p. 26). Bruce's Canon of Scripture, which surveys the Catholic Church Fathers and others on this subject, makes it painfully evident that the canon was not unilaterally decided top-down by a small group of individuals on top of the Catholic Church's hierarchy.

37 . Life--How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by Creation? (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1985), pp. 208-10; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 68; Schoville, Biblical Archaeology in Focus, p. 130; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 177-78, 186-87.

38 . Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 36, 55-56; Lockyer, Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 1000.

39 . Yigael Yadin, Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 193, 195; as cited by Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 149-50.

40 . Moshe Pearlman, Digging Up the Bible (1980), p. 85; as quoted in Life--How Did It Get Here?, p. 209; K.A. Kitchen, "Shishak," Bromiley, ed., ISBN, vol. 4, p. 489; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 154-55.

41 . Schoville, Biblical Archaeology in Focus, pp. 142, 485; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 156-57, 160-61; Life--How Did It Get Here?, pp. 212-13; W.S. LaSor, "Shalmaneser," Bromiley, ed., ISBN, vol. 4, p. 446.

42 . Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 183-85; Life--How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or By Creation?, pp. 209-10.

43 . Raymond Philip Dougherty, Nabonidus and Belshazzar (1929), p. 200 as cited in Life--How Did It Get Here?, p. 211; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, p. 205.

44 . Life--How Did It Get Here?, pp. 210-11; Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 192, 205.

45 . Berg, Treasures in the Sand, pp. 131-33, 142, 157, 181, 195-200, 205-7; Lockyer, ed., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 992.

46 . The Bible: God's Word or Man's? (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1989), pp. 49-53; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 191, 195-96; John Garstang, The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges (London: Constable, 1931), p. 146, the last as noted in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 69.

47 . Morey, New Atheism, p. 127; William F. Albright, The Archaeology of Palestine, rev. ed (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1960), p. 141, as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 73.

48 . Michael J. Howard, "Unearthing Pontius Pilate," Baltimore Sun, March 24, 1980, pp. B1, B2; as found in Life--How Did It Get Here?, pp. 211-12.

49 . McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 70-73; D. James Kennedy, Why I Believe (1980), p. 28, as cited by Mario Seiglie, "How to Understand the Bible," Good News, Sept./Oct. 1997, p. E2; see also Morey, New Atheism, p. 128.

50 . C.L. Blomberg, "Quirinius," Bromiley, ed., ISBN, vol. 4, p. 12-13; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 365-66; Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament in Crampon's French Bible (1939), p. 360, as cited by Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1383; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among

Us, pp. 200-204; see also McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 71. Sir William Ramsay runs his arguments in favor of certain inscriptions found in and around Antioch as favoring Quirinius serving an earlier term as legate in Syria in The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, pp. 285, 291, as cited in Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 2 (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., 1988), p. 767; see also p. 722.

51 . McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 204. (Their form of citation appears to be nonstandard, but they reference it to his Poetics).

52 . Kingsley Davis, Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., 5:168, as cited by Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 366; Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1383; John Elder, Prophets, Idols and Diggers (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 160, as cited by McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 71; Harold W. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 15; Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. R.M. Strachen, 4th ed. (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 270-71, the last two as cited by McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 201-2; Lockyer, ed., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 214.

53 . Annals, Loeb edition, 15, 44; as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 49. They make a detailed defense of the authenticity of this statement, including a reasonable argument that Tacitus based his statement on public records, not just hearsay from Christians in Rome. Both Justin Martyr and Tertullian challenged readers to look up such records about certain details of Jesus' life. (See pp. 48-51).

54 . Lucian, The Passing Peregrinus; Suetonius, Life of Claudius, 25, 4; Pliny the Younger, Epistles, X, 96, all as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 82-85.

55 . See Antiquities, book 18, chapter 5, section 2, cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 37-38.

56 . Antiquities, book 20, chapter 9, section 1; as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 38-39. Interestingly, in Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 83, McDowell cites a more skeptical translation of Josephus in this passage: "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James." The Greek reads "ho legomenos Christos," which Josephus at least once elsewhere uses in a dismissive tone, such as when he refers to Alexandria as Apion's alleged birthplace. Although the New Testament uses it non-skeptically in Matt. 1:16, it's necessary to determine how Josephus uses this term, not how the New Testament does to judge what Josephus meant. By this rendering, it's completely impossible that it was a Christian scribe's fabricated interpolation. Even the less skeptical version is still a very weak affirmation for a Christian scribe bent on perverting Josephus into a supporter of Christianity. See France, Evidence for Jesus, p. 27, 171 (fn. 12).

57 . France, Evidence for Jesus, pp. 29-31; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 41-45. An Arabic text of this same passage of Josephus has been found in a tenth century manuscript. This may contain something closer to the original, assuming a Muslim scribe hadn't toned down the doctored up "Christianized" version!

58 . See Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 137-38.

59 . Fox, Pagans and Christians, pp. 482-83; Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Menorah Publishing Co., 1925), p. 23; Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 4th ed., trans. R.M. Strachen (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 73-74; Morris Goldstein, Jesus in Jewish Tradition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 38, 39, the last three as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 66-67.

60 . A good attempt to deal with the various issues raised by the parallel accounts of the resurrection is found in Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 345-56.

61 . Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 337-38; Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, pp. 1117-19.

62 . John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, n.d.), p. 389; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 378-79; Kevin D. Miller, "The War of the Scrolls," Christianity Today (Oct. 6, 1997), p. 43.

63 . Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 221-22, 401.

64 . Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 316; Haley, Alleged Discrepancies, pp. 325-26; John H. Wheeler, "Letter to Eric V. Snow," July 19, 199[7], p. 6.

65 . Is the Bible Really the Word of God? (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1969), pp. 83-86; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 332-33; W.E. Vine, and Merrill F. Unger and William White, eds., An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 296.

66 . C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), p. 56; Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962 (original publication, 1910), p. 1095, as cited by Josh McDowell, More than a Carpenter (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1977), p. 29.

67 . McDowell develops this line of reasoning at length. See More than a Carpenter, pp. 25-35; Evidence That Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 103-9.

68 . James Edward Leslie Newbigin, The Finality of Christ (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 62, as quoted in Josh McDowell, The Resurrection Factor (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 15.

69 . Dr. J.N.D. Anderson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Christianity Today, March 29, 1968, p. 6, as cited by McDowell, Resurrection Factor, p. 81. The evidence for the first century composition of the New Testament was discussed earlier above, a point that administers a death blow to claims that the Gospels were myths or legends. They simply were written much too close in time to the events they describe to fit in with how works in this literary genre develop.

70 . McDowell, More than a Carpenter, pp. 60-77, 89-100; McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 179-263; McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 13-103; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 278-90.

71 . Michael Green, Man Alive (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 36, as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 218.

72 . See McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 210-14; McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 54-55.

73 . As summarized by Heinrich Kluerer in Paul H. Hoch, Joseph Zubin, and Grhune Stratton, eds., Psychopathology of Perception (New York: n.p., 1965), p. 18; L.E. Hinsie and J. Shatsky, Psychiatric Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 280, both as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 249-50.

74 . George Currie, The Military Discipline of the Romans from the Founding of the City to the Close of the Republic, pp. 41-43, as cited in McDowell, Resurrection Factor, p. 93.

75 . See the Worldwide Church of God reprint article, "Did Christ Die of a Broken Heart?," 1959, 1972, pp. 3-5.

76 . Thomas James Thorburn, The Resurrection Narratives and Modern Criticism (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1910), pp. 183-85, as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 233; David Friedrich Strauss, The Life of Jesus for the People, 2d ed. (London: William & Norgate, 1879), vol. 1, p. 412, as cited by McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 98-99.

77 . See Dave Hunt and Ed Decker, The God Makers (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), pp. 102-3.

78 . The information above on the Quran is mostly based upon Robert Morey, Islam Unveiled: The True Desert Storm (Shermans Dale, PA: The Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 48-51, 61, 75-76, 116-21, 131-41. The verse numbers as cited above are those of J.M. Rodwell's 1861 translation of the Quran into English, with some reference to Dawood's revised 1974 translation. Morey's book is decidedly imperfect: He is careless sometimes, proofread it poorly, and apparently doesn't know Islamic/Middle Eastern history in-depth. Using a ridiculously out of context citation of the Quran, he falsely accuses Islam of racism (p. 150). Nevertheless, enough remains in his work to destroy any rational faith in Islam, which another publisher reissued as The Islamic Invasion. Background on the Satanic Verses incident also comes from W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 60-65.